

2017

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# TOYON

VOL . 63

2017



# TOYON

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*Multilingual Journal  
of Literature and Art*

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# TOYON

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*Multilingual Journal  
of Literature and Art*

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HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY

2017 | Volume 63



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# **Dedication**

In memory of

Victoria Dodge

November 15, 1949 - December 6, 2016



# Award Winners

**Environmental Studies Department Award** *Best Work of Environmental Justice Writing or Art*

*The Watchers of the Water*, Luke T. McCarthy

**Department of World Languages and Cultures Trilingual Poetry Award**  
*For Poetry in Spanish, English, and Spanglish*

First Place: *Regaños*, Ihovanna Huevo

Second Place: *Ni de aquí ni de allá*, Jéssica Melgoza

Third Place: *Who I am*, Andrea C. Curtade

**Toyon Multilingual Award** *Best Work in Translation, Spanish, or Multiple Languages*

*Soy la hija de inmigrantes*, Andrea C. Curtade

**Jodi Stutz Award** *Best Work of Poetry*

*Strange Fruit (for Michael Brown)*, Donel Arrington

**Richard Cortez Day Advisor's Prize** *Best Work of Fiction*

*A Glorious Storm*, Bryan E. Kashon

**Redwood Empire Mensa Award** *Best Work of Creative Non-Fiction*

*Weakness Is What's In-Between Your Legs*, Lorelei O. Farrell

**English Department Award** *Best Work of Critical Analysis*

*Roxana: A Contemporary Analysis to an Eighteenth Century Voice for Women's Rights*, Kendra Gardner

**Toyon Staff Award** *Best Work of Visual Art*

*Woven Woman*, Rebecca J. Baldwin





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# Editorial Statement

*Toyon* is Humboldt State University's annual literary magazine. The magazine's editorial staff is comprised of a team of students dedicated to producing a high-quality publication whose contents incorporate multiple and diverse forms of work. Since its original publication in 1954, *Toyon* has continually aimed to promote diversity within the community and beyond.

*Toyon* exists to encourage creative expression in Humboldt County. Writers and artists of all backgrounds may find inspiration within its pages, and are invited to share with *Toyon* their own creative contributions. We are always delighted and honored to receive your work.

The process of evaluating submissions is undertaken with great care and respect. All submissions are evaluated by blind review, and each submission is given due consideration before a decision is made. Staff develop their own criteria for evaluating submissions, which are reflective of their understanding that literary merit comes in many forms. *Toyon* encourages writers and artists to share their unique experiences and ideas in the creative form(s) of their choice.

Challenges to stylistic and genre conventions are encouraged and sought out. In particular, *Toyon* staff search for works that exhibit craft and artistic innovation. *Toyon* submissions may fall into any of the following categories: visual art, criticism, spoken word, poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, environmental justice writing, and translation. As part of its dedication to embracing cultural diversity and inclusiveness, *Toyon* accepts submissions in Spanish and English and translations in all languages.

Toyon Editorial Staff  
Arcata, CA  
December 2016



# Acknowledgements

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HSU Department of English

HSU Environmental Studies Program

HSU Department of World Languages and Cultures

College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences





## The Watchers of the Water

by Luke T. McCarthy

The watchers of the water  
The lovers of land  
The keepers of the creatures  
The savers of the sky

They're here to look after  
To lend a helping hand  
Never once meager  
They never ask why

With bones of rock, hair of grass, flesh of mud, and blood of water  
They are born, of the land, from the earth, her sons and daughters

But who came first  
The whites or the reds?  
I guess it all depends  
On the story you've been fed

Which of us thirst  
The whites or the reds?  
All of us do  
Without water we'd be dead

The Watchers of the Water have been here since the beginning  
Long before white men came with swords, blood spilling

Their land has been divided, split and claimed  
Their cultures diminished, they've been through great pain

Their faith has been corrupted and their names have been changed  
Despite all the hurt, their spirit still remains

Today they are strong, their presence is great  
Standing together, to fight the black snake

Who came first  
The whites or the reds?  
Who knows the land?  
The reds, the reds

Who came first  
The whites or the reds?  
Who fights for the land?  
The reds, the reds

They fight for the Earth, not for money or for race  
For they know that nature, is our only saving grace

They know the whispers of the wind, and language of the seas  
They speak the tongue of the wild, know the spirits of the trees

The Watchers of the Water  
The lovers of the land  
The keepers of the creatures  
The savers of the sky

They are born, of the land, from the Earth, her sons and daughters  
They have been here, from the beginning, the Watchers of the Waters

Soy la hija de inmigrantes  
by Andrea C. Curtade

I am the daughter of immigrants.  
Those who have risked their lives  
for their unborn children,  
those who have crossed oceans to find  
la tierra hermosa.  
Soy el producto de la cultura hispana,  
feet separated by a border,  
oppression felt on both sides.  
Branded by my dark skin,  
set apart by my language.  
Oigo la voz de mi madre  
hablando con dios,  
begging to give us a better life  
than the one she's ever known.

## Regaños Ihovanna Huevo

Oiga, mi chicanita, usted ya no.  
Ya no se deje, niña mía.  
No se deje engañar.  
A usted nomás le cuentan ilusiones.  
Porque mire usted, mi chicanita,  
que es rebonito tener una mano empujando por la espalda  
y no nomás por debajo de su falda.  
¡Y no es que no sea bonito tener lo que quiera por donde uno le haga!  
Ah, pero mire, chicanita, que con las piernas se camina  
pero la espalda es la que yergue.  
¿No le dijo, chicanita, su abuela y su madre?  
Que se cuide por dónde van las manos  
y que cuide por donde ande el gallo.  
¿Se acuerda?  
El gallo a usted la pisa y la llena de adornos  
y ay luego no tarda y le estira la mano.  
Esa mano es rebuscona, chicanita.  
A usted le dijo su madre, chicanita,  
que se me cuide bien de esa mano del patriarca.  
Porque esa mano, chicanita,  
es la que le va a andar rebusqueteando no nomás por la falda.  
Esa mano, mi niñita, esa mano es la que le mueve al gallo  
y esa mano, chicanita, es la que se la quiere hacer de Dios  
y sacarle a usted, mi chicanita, todo lo que su madre le ha otorgado.  
Su madre Pachamama le regaló a usted el regalo de la vida;  
su sangre, chicanita, es la vida, mi mujer.  
Su vientre, mi chicana, es su puño en el aire;  
y su puño es la sangre de su vientre,  
la sangre de sus hijos, chicanita,  
la de su pueblo  
y de su gente.

Ni de aquí ni de allá  
by Jéssica Melgoza

Soy mexican@  
Soy american@  
Y a la vez  
No soy nadie

Ni de aquí ni de allá

No soy lo suficiente para México  
Ni soy lo suficiente para América  
No soy ni de aquí ni de allá  
Así qué dime tú “¿quién soy?”

Ni de aquí ni de allá

Mi identidad se distorsiona  
Mi voz es silenciada  
Mi ser es solo lo que ves  
Y a la vez, lo que no puedes ver

Ni de aquí ni de allá

Soy mexican@-american@  
Soy la sombra de una ilusión  
Y la fuerza de un sueño  
Dime tú “¿quién soy?”

Who I am  
by Andrea C. Curtade

My name is  
Andrea  
(An  
    D-r ay  
        Ah)  
Curtade  
(Curr  
    Tah  
        De)

Do not stray from this pronunciation  
Not because I feel entitled,  
Simply because my mother  
wanted it that way.

She wanted the use of the entire tongue  
to command the room with strength.  
To acknowledge her daughter's heritage  
and give versatility to her voice.

Do not stray from this pronunciation  
it is the struggle of what my parents endured  
and it is what they accomplished.  
It is who I am.

Strange Fruit (*for Michael Brown*)  
by Donel Arrington

“Hands up, hands up up don’t shoot!”  
still the same damn strange fruit,  
blood on the leaves and blood on the root  
now it grows from the street  
instead of the trees,  
tear gas, sound cannons,  
militarized police,

how many children gotta die  
before we heal this divide?

societies irrational fear of black men—  
putting too many black kids in early coffins

hiding behind badges, and  
stand your ground,  
crying self defense  
as the lights go out  
on the wrong side  
of the line between right

and now

and it’s a shout out but not  
just about Michael Brown  
it’s a road that every black person  
in America’s been down.

like when I was driving in my car,  
heard the siren sound  
pull over to the side and the  
officer comes out,  
“put your hands on the wheel  
where I can see them NOW!”  
unclipping the holster hand  
gun on his belt,  
all just for driving in the left lane—  
no ticket, no bullets, no harm  
no foul.



or the time I was walking  
to work, getting stopped just for  
being out at 6AM  
70 yards away from my house,

“don’t move, let me see some ID!  
we’ve been having a lot of robberies you see  
and you kind of look suspect to me.”

or the fear of our parents  
every time we leave the house.

see I was taught how to  
act around police  
since I was 11 years’ old  
taught that I’d be shot  
if I broke the mold—

but even with our hands up,  
sometimes they still shoot  
black bodies dropping  
the same old strange fruit  
blood on the leaves  
and blood on the root,

and I think that it’s time  
we confronted the truth,  
it’s 2016  
and we as a people  
still caught in the noose

Humboldt State University

# The Unspoken Has Spoken

by Kristian Gildardo Espinoza

Sorry you tremble  
At the sound of privilege  
The way it falls heavy  
From exhausted eyelids  
The way it falls out  
From oppressed mouths

You understand it's historical  
So it doesn't help  
When it's taken personal  
Take the responsibility  
Your ancestors left  
And stop torturing souls  
With your  
All-lives-matter bullsh\*t

Sincerely,  
Kristian

I want nothing more of big things  
by Jonathan Greenhouse

of theories of the universe & what lies beyond:  
I want to be small again,

to think of the infinitesimal,  
to ponder a grain of sand & marvel at its shape & color,

not compare it to all other grains, not be overwhelmed  
by how infinite they seem.

I want to forget the past,  
no longer feel its weight. I want to close my eyes

& see a black space; & when reopened, I only want to see  
what's in this miniscule frame.

I want to say my name  
& only hear the syllables it makes, to sit on the grass,

feel each blade, & watch the impression I've made;  
how my body bends them,

the fresh soil loosening  
as wind ruffles my hair. I want the sun to be reduced

to a sensation of heat, to a light by which to see  
when I reopen my eyes.

I want nothing more of big things.  
Give me only the small: I will seize them with relish

& take them all.

## Kids

by Miles R. Hay

I sometimes wonder  
if someday I'll meet  
the woman who talks me  
into having kids.  
Or maybe we've already  
met and things just haven't  
gone that far yet.

I've watched untold multitudes  
of harridans and oafs  
dragging their spawn  
down the street, into  
grocery stores, restaurants,  
emergency rooms, movie theaters,  
home from school,  
with a practiced look  
that is  
(not for lack of trying),  
quite unlike relief.

Always crying, redundant lumps  
of protoplasm.  
Small tragedies with parents  
who wear sweatpants and bunny slippers  
in public.

Of course,  
practicing for it  
is always fun.  
But the world  
is dangerously  
overpopulated  
as it is. Civic duty  
demands that the family  
name dies with me.

The family name almost  
died with my father,  
in no rush to have children

of his own for the best of  
reasons having to do with specters of  
cocktail parties, tennis, and blank-eyed  
debutante-puppets whose own fathers  
owned a vineyard somewhere and wanted  
to nuke Vietnam.

But, as will happen now and then, somehow  
my mother eventually inspired him.  
Or wore him down.  
I still don't know which it was.  
All I know is that the condoms  
somehow made it into  
the waste basket one night.

So...does this go on?  
Me perhaps playing the distant father  
retiring to my study with book and bottle,  
at least until  
the kid gets old enough  
to be worth having  
a conversation with?

What, for that matter,  
would we even talk about?

I suppose if I were to go far enough  
to give advice,  
I would say  
that they should love openly,  
somehow,  
no matter what the neighbors think,  
being generous enough to assume  
that the neighbors can think at all.  
Embarrass yourself, laugh.  
Most things are accidental,  
like a bird flying into a window.  
Although  
just maybe  
some things aren't,  
like a meeting of the eyes  
across a room nearly empty

at an hour  
when all respectable people  
should be home in bed.  
No one asks  
to come to this sideshow,  
whatever it is.  
Far fewer get to choose  
how to leave it.  
Though maybe with a modicum of honesty,  
they could.  
Beneath screaming neon,  
around Earth's imagined  
corners, I suppose  
that we're all just here  
to help each other through  
this thing, whatever it is.

Now then...  
off to bed.

Soneto para los Bilinguals  
by Adyn McCabe

No sé si me consider bilingual.  
Los requisitos no están claros.  
My tongue trips; a clumsy match of singles.  
My mouth no tiene su propia barrio.

Mi español viene de la earth's corners.  
No sound, excepto desordenado.  
Voice unrouted, forever foreigner.  
Un destino bien resignado.

Ya nadie es el mismo bilingüe.  
Somos nuestro propio idioma.  
Si un lenguaje has a thousand doorways.  
We're infinite; el epic poema.

Mi voz es un antiguo percusión,  
simplemente con un cambio de tone.

## Three Memes in Three Minutes by Barbara Ruth

Stay in the cabin one month,  
water  
firewood  
and food all provided.  
No internet  
cell phones  
TV.  
Would I do it for \$100,000?

The Harvard Graduate School of Emojis declares  
my brain is hardwired for negatives  
but learning new skills and affirmations  
brings me fresh neurons  
at the backslash  
/Biology of Positive Habits.  
Will I follow the link?

Sungazing.com says: Everything Heals  
with an image of lotus-eared Buddha  
My soul repairs itself day by day  
they say.  
Would Sungazing Buddha lie?

Facebook now gives me six  
emoticons to convey my reactions  
I hover among them.  
Too many? Too few? Will I click?



To Be Read At My Wake  
by Jeffrey H. MacLachlan

Now my career  
begins. I started  
as a white boy who  
became a white man  
and now I'm a white  
corpse—the traditional  
evolution of an American  
writer. Flip back  
to my poems  
of death and examine  
which ones became  
premonitions.  
I'll be bleeding  
heavenly spotlights  
from my nose to my section  
on the bookstore shelf  
long after developers  
bulldoze the place  
into a technology park.

There are more  
people here than all  
my readings combined  
and probably  
my wedding? I can barely  
sustain a page, let alone  
relationships, but if so,  
I coached my wife  
to read this stanza  
with sugar and aplomb.  
Honey, I hope I was fair  
to you, because lord  
knows I might bump  
into every woman  
I've plundered  
with a pen. If I fracked  
for blood with paper  
cuts, here's your chance  
to slip my body

below layers of earth  
like a stiff bookmark  
and slam the dust  
cover shut.

Nature  
by Ivan de Monbrison

Un bout de ciel  
dépasse de la fenêtre  
il n'y a personne dans la pièce  
pourtant quelqu'un respire  
le tableau accroché  
donne sur un paysage  
une silhouette avance  
sur un chemin  
qui suit la courbe des collines  
pourtant dehors  
par-delà la fenêtre  
les oiseaux du matin  
l'ombre sous l'olivier  
le bruit de la fontaine  
et le vent dans les branches  
parlent une langue commune  
dont j'ai tout oublié

A piece of sky  
overlapping the window  
the room still empty  
yet someone is breathing  
the painting hanging there  
overlooks a landscape  
a figure walking  
on a path  
follows the curves of the hills  
yet outside  
beyond the window  
the morning birds  
the shade under the olive tree  
the noise of the fountain  
and the wind in the boughs  
speak a common language  
which I have forgotten

La Flor de Magnolia  
by Katia G. Karadjova

La flor de magnolia—

la rotura de las leyes de existencia,  
prosperando en la lluvia precipitada,

profundas raíces oscuras  
y persistencia.

Una magia bochornosa de colores

en una ramita de realidad—

que se posa como la paloma

como el amor imposible.



Arroz y enchiladas rojas  
by Cynthia Serrano

At any given time, when you were alive,  
you had red enchilada sauce and a pan of arroz guisado  
ready to feed anyone who walked through the door,  
your upbringing dictating the movements of your day.

I say I miss your arroz most of all, but it's not true.  
There are other parts that I miss,  
parts that gather in my mind's eye when I think of you,

like your smile, which never showed your teeth  
but always reached your eyes  
and never failed to show your warmth and glee,

and your skin, soft caramel gathered in wrinkles,  
the warmest I ever held.  
Will my skin be as soft and brown one day?

And your hair, curly until I reached age 15,  
was not natural but  
chemically enhanced and cropped close to your scalp.

No one would guess your hair once hung past your waist,  
heavy and pin straight.  
Not even me, for I had known your short hair my whole life.

The urge to cut all your hair was not an individual experience;  
you passed it onto your daughters,  
and your granddaughters, in turn, took it up too.

I feel the same urge: to cook your rice and model your industriousness,  
to grow your hair. But I've fallen short;  
my rice is not soft enough, my hair only hangs past my shoulders.

One day I too hope to be prepared, to mother a clan of women  
who cut and recut, grow and regrow their hair,  
but for now, sigo guisando tu arroz y mi pelo sigue creciendo.

## Writing Lesson Plans

by Joe Shermis

I lit out for my very soul,  
I searched for greens, and blues,  
I dipped down into blood and guts,  
And worked from writing cues;  
It came to me in sprinkles,  
With intermittent rain  
That stretched the length  
Of all good things  
And back around to pain...

I searched for what I could convey,  
I looked at film and page,  
I separated what I felt  
From the poet's mental rage;  
It came to me in moments  
That those blues and greens were felt,  
And as I pasted what I found  
I played what I was deal...

I asked for strength and guidance,  
I prayed for more than rain,  
Requesting that the answer  
Transcend the truth of pain;  
It raised the simple question,  
Why do poems rhyme,  
And what lights up  
Our very soul  
When keeping things in time...?



## Weakness Is What's In-Between Your Legs by Lorelei O. Farrell

I wanted to learn how to fight.

And yet, I stood there. Stood there, with an astounded sense of reality sending me downward with the swiftness of the round-house kick I still failed to execute with precision.

Right between the eyes. Words can be just as forceful of a weapon as two withered fists coming at you straight. Right between the eyes.

My own fists been clenched; tighter still as my embarrassment swelled in my throat. The saliva had built up so much I had to swallow it back. It tasted bitter, and coursed like the lactic acid in my legs and the heat in my face.

My ears were ringing with his voice, and all the rest of theirs, sharing their take on female capability.

“You generally want to position yourself this way. When you’re up close with someone— you know how girls usually go for the face and hair in fights.”

*Not me, you prick.* I kept my fists pinned at my sides. *Thanks for partnering me with the only other vagina in the class. I’m sure she appreciates it too.*

I wished then and there I had the agility and experience to go for the bastard’s throat. To strip him of his condescending sureness. To prove him wrong. A month had been wasted as every day it was another comment, or cold shoulder, for assistance, or serious recommendation of technique.

*I am outnumbered,* I thought. *My intrusion is made known every time I am partnered with someone other than a ‘girl’.* *I am worthless here, I have no place.*

When my strength was remarked on, the bile only grew fiercer. *Why does it surprise you, asshole?* I recalled the incidents: the spit in my face, the years of psychological warfare, wasting breath and hostility over having to defend myself to drunks and oppressors, and having to idly stand by and allow myself to be subjugated for my inherited ‘weakness’.

But my taut muscle, legs, feet, and bone proved them otherwise. I knew they were meant for withstanding the weight of countless adversities.

I was just the awkward amateur having to make justifications worth the shame and grated teeth. What was I paying for again?

I wanted to learn how to fight.

Not with tongue.

Not with wit.

But with my bare hands. An agentic power systematically rendering me inferior for far too long.

Adrenaline is a tricky thing.

A ninety dollar lesson for the life-long ‘wisdom’ and up-front effect of machismo bullshit.

I could’ve just gone back home for free lessons.

## Grave of the Forest by Anthony J. McGough

With every step I took, the sounds of the campus died away, leaving me immersed only in the tranquil din of the forest. Tall, mighty, and proud redwoods towered over me, wondering what business I had in their forest—their guarded sanctuary.

“Just exploring,” I said softly, “just clearing my head.” The gentle swaying of the leaves over my head told me they accepted my reason, and granted me passage. The leaves in particular were a stunning flourish of reds, yellows and oranges. Some of them fell to the ground, laying a path out in front of me.

The wind was brisk and refreshing, bringing the musky smell of fresh earth and wet bark. I marched across the fallen leaves, letting them lead me deeper into the forest. The sun was setting, casting beams of light through the open patches in the tree line; specks of dirt and dust danced through the air. Through it, I could see the last remnants of the passing storm, grey and dark clouds, broken up into small chunks.

I decided to take a detour to my normal spot, turning right at the break in the path. A group of joggers ran past, wishing me a good evening. I greeted them with a smile and a wave and continued on my way. The new path was uphill, and my legs burned from exhaustion. Still, I pressed on, stopping to examine a stump with leaves growing out of it like hair.

Bushes and trees perfectly lined the path, creating a corridor through the forest. Going in this direction, you would have never noticed the little house nestled away off the path. It was elegant despite its size, made of polished, dark wood. One of the windows caught a glare from the sun that reflected into my eye, a wink of sorts.

I looked up as the trees thinned out a little, taking in the beautiful blend of autumn colors and blue sky. It stirred a memory within me; I had seen this particular blend of colors before, long ago. It was a surreal and curious moment, yet the memory eluded me, dancing just out of reach. With a sigh, I pressed on, passing the fenced off oil drum. Next to it was a small pile of broken branches, the leftovers of standing trees.

I rounded the corner, stepping across soft dirt as opposed to the usual crunchy gravel. It was a nice change but it wouldn't last. Another hill, another push. The evening sun painted the tree trunks a nice shade of a maroon.

Further up, I noticed the trees were spaced a little more, and there was a mass of lumber between them. There was an unorganized, chaotic scene as opposed to the natural chaos of the forest.

I crested the hill, and to my left there was the body of a tree, snapped in half with both its sides resting next to each other. I could see the red innards of its corpse, surrounded by splinters and large bark fragments. I sucked in a sharp breath, unsure how else to respond to the discovery of a fallen guardian.

Just a little further, I entered a graveyard filled with its brothers.

It smelled of Christmas, but it looked like death. Trees lay fallen on both sides of the path, their insides and branches strewn about, sap still bleeding from some of them. Even the gravel had been cleared away, leaving a path of dirt that led to the culprit: a yellow murderer in the form of a timber crane.

I lingered amongst the bodies, but dared not to take too long. An ominous presence hung over this carnage. Down the path, I found the sign that said 'Timber Yard.' The forest was rich with thousands of trees, yet my heart ached at seeing the fallen ones.

It took some time, but I finally arrived at my site. The dirt road ran across the clearing, flanked by two slopes. One ran down to a small river that babbled with the cadence of running water. Dandelions and buckwheat stood like soldiers in an army across the dry grass that coated the hillside.

Across the way, a young family played near the set of concrete cylinders lying on their sides. The parents watched as their sons built a rock pile.

Overhead, the wind pushed the fluffy cloud in front of the sun, dimming the world. A lone slug laid in its own slime near the wooden bench just sitting off the path. The fresh scent of pine leaves and flowers wafted across the hillside as I sat down.

I thought back on the graveyard of trees I had stumbled upon. It had left an odd melancholy in my heart that I didn't know what to do with. I thought about the tree that would eventually sit in my living room, and wondered how I was different from those who tore them down.

## Paper Girls by Sydney Hubbel

When we were children, we used to play Desert Island in the backyard of my parent's house. My mother had planted three birch trees haphazardly in the grass and we would take their seeds and grind them up in an old mortar. We had seen videos in school of how people long before us ground up wheat and acorns with a stone on the ground to make flour, and we tried to mimic them using a relic from my grandmother's potion cabinet.

Ours was a full house with all three kids in one bedroom and my grandmother at the end of the hall. My father worked from home, his office in the living room. Us kids had to play outside as to not disturb him, not that it bothered us. The house was always musky and dimly lit with an overwhelming scent of incense coming from my grandmother's bedroom at the end of the hall. Incense and too many candles. I learned later in life that it was all to cover up the smell of a friendlier herb, not that we had any idea what it was anyway.

The neighbors hardly allowed their children over, and never allowed them inside. Our house was the weird one on the block, the home of the witches, where spirits danced and children disappeared. That never made sense to me. Our house was always full of children. There were three of us who belonged there and two that seemed to appear from nowhere. But our house was the weird one - where our imaginations came to life. In our minds, our house was a desert island, a pirate's cove, a witch's lair, a faerie's burrow. It was everything but the worn down little shack on Jameson street.

My whole world was on that street in those initial years. Church, school, home, and the few friends I had. I lived in a packed room that I shared with my two sisters, sealed in by blue walls and a wood-beaded curtain painted with dolphins. I hated dolphins and I hated the color blue. Truthfully, I was so full of hate in those early years. I felt I had nowhere I belonged, I was so unlike all those around me. I was an angry child with a box in my closet of pictures I cut out from my mother's fashion magazines. It was an old Converse box full of beautiful women. I loved looking at them. At the time I didn't really know why I loved it so much or why I cut them out in the first place. I was ashamed of it, but anytime I was alone in my shared bedroom, I'd sit on the closet floor and marvel over their smooth skin and long hair.

The women in the pictures told me I was an ugly sort of girl. I didn't have flowing thick hair, smooth skin, or long legs like the girls in the magazines. I was a frumpy child with thin hair and blotchy, freckled skin. I was constantly dirty with grubby fingers, matted hair, scabby knees, and always with a dirt smudge on my nose. I wore grungy hand-me-down clothes- so unlike the beautiful garb the magazine women adorned. They made me feel horrible about myself but still I couldn't resist looking at them.

Soon the dirt smudge on my nose came from having it stuffed in old books rather than pressed up against dirty glass and the paper women were replaced by one paper girl. Compared to the women hidden in my closet, she was an ugly girl too, with bushy hair and bucked teeth similar to my own. When I first met her, she was bullied just as I had been. It was not long before I began to relate to her. Then her character developed. Her intelligence was quickly revealed and she was loved for it. She was powerful and influential, yet often ignored. Like me, she was known among her classmates to always have her nose buried in a book; and she was mocked for it just as I was. However, it was the books that built her character, and so inspired me to follow suit.

Because of this paper girl, I stopped seeing myself as an "ugly sort of girl" and instead a smart girl and a powerful girl. It no longer mattered what I looked like as long as my mind was sharp and my tongue was quick. Before long, I was fascinated with the living woman behind the paper girl, someone I found even more inspiring. This woman called Rowling had built an entire world within her mind and used it to pull millions of children like me out of the dark pit of self-hate. She was a woman who shaped a generation into socially conscious adults in a world that thrives on the misfortune of others.

My house was the weird one on the block, full of witches and ugly little girls - but I learned to embrace it. I began to love witches and took pride in the rumors. The pretty little girls with bows in their hair could laugh as they pleased at my dirty nose and holes in my clothes. I would no longer let them shame me for what made me different, because my role models taught me that those things were of little importance - something I'd never have learned from beautiful women in magazines. My home became full of life and my mind full of wonder.



Woven Woman  
by Rebecca J. Baldwin





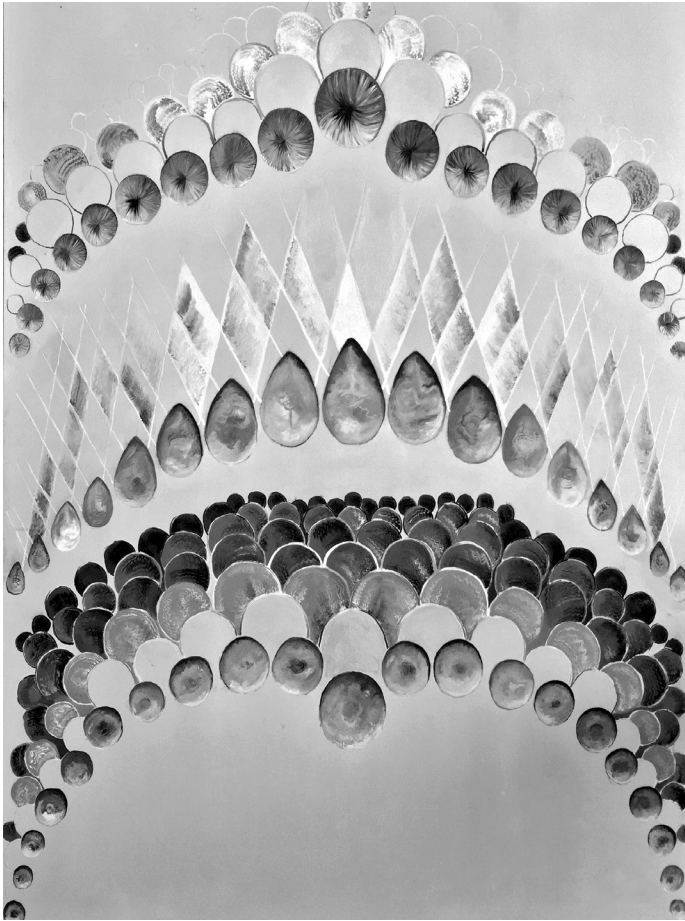


Metamorphosis Diptych  
by Barbara Becerra

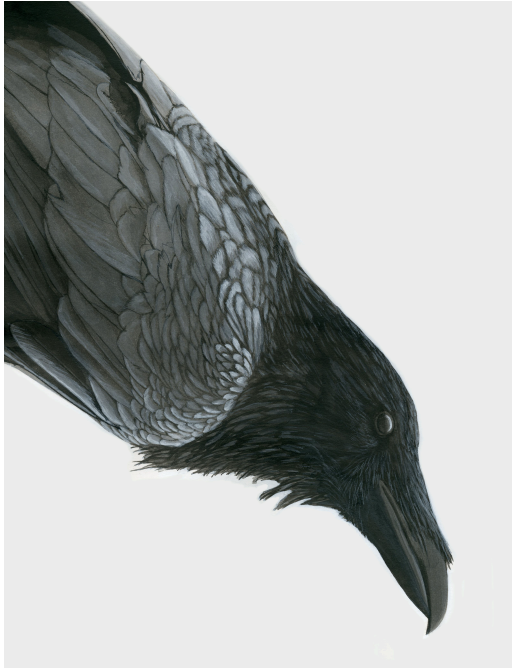




Beauty Over Life  
by Erin Urbanus



Pearl Necklace  
by Daisy N. Ramirez



Raven  
by Elisa N. Griego



**Greedy Modern Organization (G.M.O.) Paradise**  
by Haley M. Davis

## Queen for a Day by Kimberly Carlson

**W**e left behind smog, freeways that merged and overlapped, paved roads with concrete sidewalks, yards with no gardens or jackrabbits. We left behind dads, grandmas, aunts, and cousins. We left behind my favorite aunt, Rita. My favorite partly because she loved me, partly because I felt sorry for her, partly because she was a dreamer and had been glamorous.

She moved from the hills of Tennessee and headed out to California looking for love. She dyed her hair to match Marilyn Monroe's. Her complexion then was porcelain white, her lips full, her eyes perfectly placed, dazzling with light. Her curvaceous figure begged to be touched. As a child I'd close my eyes and imagine her as she had been back then, laughing and smoking cigarettes, while men asked to cut off locks of her hair.

She died in her fifties from a drug overdose, maybe it was a heart attack. She wasn't found for days. After not answering phone calls, my Aunt Jesse had to crawl through her bedroom window, breaking through the tin foil Rita used to block out any sunlight so she could sleep late into the day, and there Rita lay stiff on her bed. There was an ashtray of cigarette butts on her nightstand. In the kitchen her drugs sat nicely placed like some might display salt and pepper and cinnamon oregano. She had to take her meds with food at exact times of the day, except for particular nights she couldn't sleep and needed to take more. This happened often.

I never knew the Jones beauty. Other than through photographs, my image of her holds a woman with Thorazine purple skin, a swollen belly, looking more pregnant than fat, her hair dyed copper, or sometimes the platinum blonde from her glamour days. Her right hand shaped into a claw from falling and passing out on a floor heater, as if mistaken for a dangerous animal who needed its nails removed, but she had always been the prey, the snow white bunny, the newly born kitten.

I am told her daddy used to chase her around with a knife because she snuck into his hidden stash of watermelons to steal one to break open and eat. He was selfish and he was saving the melons to sell. I am told she loved her first husband but he died. I am told she never recovered and that her children were taken away, and she never recovered from that either, and was sent to a psychiatric ward and was raped by a counselor. And later, when the doctors discovered that she was pregnant, the baby was taken too.

Already the sleeping pills and Thorazine had claimed territory, though she tried to fight their need back. She married again and had another child. Her sisters thought she was recovering. And she had yet another child. One day she rocked her baby Rose to sleep, singing “may the circle be unbroken in the sky, Lord, in the sky.” Rose wore a cotton gown. It had purple flowers floating on a shockingly white background. Maybe there was a stain from her formula. Her mom rocked her as I hope Grandma had rocked Rita when she was an infant, soothingly, the repetitive motion of generations feeding her little soul, for Baby Rose had been loved. I was told she was beautiful, like her momma. A perfect baby. But Aunt Rita must have taken too many sleeping pills. She must have. For when she finally came to, Baby Rose was cold dead, smothered in the warmth of a drugged mother. Her husband divorced her and took Brian their son. Rita never recovered. Nope. Some pain is too big for our fragile hearts.

When my son Elias was born I swore I’d never sleep with him. If Baby Rose could die. If sweet Aunt Rita’s heart could be ripped to shreds, what would keep me from that pain?

The problem was Elias wouldn’t sleep without me. I swaddled him. Rocking, I nursed him to sleep. Barely breathing, I’d stand and lean down to set him in the bassinet that I kept by my bed. I’d ease my hand away with each breath. Sometimes instantly, sometime eight minutes into having made it to my bed next to him, he’d wake with a start. Steve, my husband, would leave the bed. I’d wear long pajamas I’d have one pillow to prop my arm and no blankets and I’d place Elias in the crook of my arm. I slept like that for a year until I felt safe adding a blanket. How many nights did I wake with a start fearing I let myself fall too deeply asleep as he lay on my belly, waking him to know that he was a still alive? There were days I thought I might go crazy for want of sleep. I’d fantasize being in a hotel room alone, taking just one Ambien and sleeping.

I am sorry that Rita never met Elias, she’d have loved playing Monopoly and Yahtzee with him. She’d have let him quiz her about the different galaxies and state capitals. She’d have adored my daughter, Anika. Rita would have spent time reading to her, holding her babies. Time and love she would have given them.

This generation wouldn’t have teased her about her crooked orange lipstick and dented felt hats. Her purple skin. Or ask her how much she earned selling her plasma. I would have made my children revere her.



She loved to have me sing to her and she thought I was pretty. She hung my picture next to hers in her hallway. This made me feel special for she was almost a star to me, one that had fallen. I was in awe that she got to go to the Oscars. She won the prize for being awarded “Queen for a Day” from the television show bearing that name. The queen was awarded for sharing the saddest most pathetic story for that episode. Rita won. I imagined her as if royalty sitting among stars like Jimmy Stewart, Clark Gable, Sophia Loren and even Grace Kelley, but we know that didn’t happen. She sat in the rafters, looking almost elegant, probably feeling worthless.

She died when I lived in Nashville. I flew into the Reno airport for a family ski trip to Tahoe. When I saw my mother walking toward me, I knew instantly something was wrong. She tried to greet me with a smile, but it was crooked, drawn by pain. Someone died. I felt it. I thought I could turn around to the moment before when everyone I loved was alive and well. I saw my brother Tommy’s face who had recently taken up rock climbing. I saw my brother, Kenny who was partying, possibly drinking and driving. We met. She placed her arms around me. Without a word we were both crying. “Rita died,” she said. And in that instant, that one moment, I felt not grief, but relief. I was so happy my brothers were safe, thanking God that at least they hadn’t died. The relief went so deep that I didn’t feel the need to go to her funeral.

She was buried in grandma’s plot. Grandma was still alive. The gravedigger dug deep and would later place grandma on top. Grandma didn’t know this. No one told her. No one told her her daughter died. Dementia had already set in and Grandma had lost one child, Bernita. She swore she’d never outlive another child. Bernita died young. Too fucking innocent and young.

I never met Nita, as she was called. I used to believe that her death was a relation to my sadness. Maybe it is. Like her I was looking for a reason for my sadness, the hollow in me that couldn’t be filled. She went missing when Mom was pregnant with me. Her body wasn’t found for six months. She had gone to the desert to pray. She was religious and all she had was her Bible. No food, no journal, no water—only her Bible. Her VW Bug got stuck in the loose hot sand, and she tried to walk out. Maybe praying all the way. “Please God, Please, I am sorry. I repent. I will not see him anymore. I swear I didn’t know he was married. You know that God. You know my heart. Please forgive me. And I promise to stop being so vain. This is a sin too. I don’t want to model anymore. I will be fine being average. Maybe I’ll be a nurse, or a teacher.” She prayed until the 120 degree heat made her fall and die. Dad and Mom went to that desert to find her. They never did. Six months later she was found

farther away from her bug than anyone thought possible. A fourth of a mile from the ranger's station. Had her prayers stopped? Did God get interrupted with something more pressing? She had only to walk fifty more steps.

My mother mourned while carrying me, her little sister who had dreams of loving a man who was married, of being a model even though she had bad skin and lopsided breasts. And I guess deep inside my mother's belly, I mourned her too, felt the sadness as each cell came into existence, creating the life that my mother named, Kimberly Sue. I was often called princess.



## A Glorious Storm

by Bryan E. Kashon

One late summer morning when the leaves buzzed with the silent intensity of the day and the sun beamed forth with clairvoyant raptness, Franklin “Jay” Thomas got a call from his best friend Ricky Kirkpatrick. Having been woken from a spectacular dream, the contents of which had left Jay rather hard, he rubbed the sleep from his eyes and answered. Before he had any chance of listening, Ricky began to talk, blazing on about something so miraculous and “astronomically wicked” that Jay had to hurry over.

“As fast as you can,” he breathed into the phone.

Dazed, Jay stared out the window, watching the breeze tickle the trees and light up his room. Sleep, dripping with heavy temptation, drained from his leaden limbs.

“Jay. Are you listening?” his dreams asked, cradling his thoughts.

“Yeah yeah,” he droned, thinking of Ricky. School was crawling closer, but this was the first time Ricky had appeared all summer. Jay pulled his covers over him and cradled the phone against his ear. Before he could choose sleep, a bolt of lightning charged through Jay’s spine as he picked up the words “dead thing.”

“What did you say?” He asked Ricky quiet, jarred from sleep, vibrating.

“You’re goddamn right, Jay. I found a dead thing,” Ricky gloated.

“So? We see dead things all the time,” said Jay, trying to brush off his excitement.

“We like dead things.”

“Debatable. I like sleep.”

“You sleep too much.”

“Untrue and impossible,” smiled Jay.

“This one’s special. It’s big.”

“Ooo I like ‘em big. What is it, a mountain lion?”

“My lips are sealed.”

“It’s a bear. Is it a bear?”

“It’s a surprise. Come on. It’ll be fun.”

“Fun. Like the “fun” things you’ve been doing all week?”

A silence, pervading and still, hung between the lines.

Ricky broke it, unsteady. “Yeah. Whatever. See you in fifteen?”

Jay glanced at his erection, shivering from his dream. “Thirty,” he decided.

A solemn oath made five summers ago required Ricky and Jay to tell each other about any dead thing they found hiking The Trails. Their promise led to a macabre collection of sights: coyotes, opossums, cats, and a nest of rabbits, among others. The worst was a doe, once blessed with beautiful indifference and a glowing tan coat, slaughtered in the forest north of their neighborhood.

Jay had been strolling, buzzing from anti-depressants, when he smelled the rotting carcass. As he got closer and spotted the writhing mass of maggots, he shuddered. Shaking, he threw up his Spaghettios. Coughing up runny smears of bile, Jay smiled at the squirming noodles swimming in the dull sunset tomato sauce. He had been rotting from the inside.

Jay retched, and walked home alone...

No one was outside on the way to Ricky's. Stomping on the premature crunchy leaves filled Jay with fiery explosions of mirth. He had felt them before, bursting, and was willing to accept the rumbling inside of him as one of the beauties of life, ever-present and inconspicuous, like the way these dying summer days brought his emotions to a boil; a steaming soul of tea within.

Jay could only describe it as kinetic energy. His body was a rubber band stretched taut. Bounding from leaf to leaf he grinned. His boots crunched and crashed into the pavement. They sent jitters through his bones.

The low thump of a bass guitar tore Jay from his thoughts.

Ricky's house was still, sitting motionless in eternity: a photograph on suburbia. As Jay walked up the oak porch, covered in cigarette butts and... *Boxes?* he felt the hues of the morning wash away. Music dinned, and family, desperate to be heard, screamed among it. A crash, (the piercing shatter of dishes), silenced the shouting, then muted the music; the sharpness sliced at Jay's eardrum and sent his head in a whirl.

Jay knocked. A deep rumble responded, a scramble followed, then, finally, the bolt clicked. Jay pushed the door ajar to Ricky's father, hefting boxes, filling up the room. Cradling a box on his hip, Ricky's dad swatted Jay's back—once, twice—smacking the breath from his lungs.

"Hey, Mr. Kirkpatrick," Jay coughed, seeing Ricky kicking his feet in the corner.

"Hey, Jay. Ricky? Kitchen. Dishes. Now."

"Yes ma'am," Ricky responded throwing up a mock salute.

Uncertainty hung in the air as Jay shuffled past Mr. Kirkpatrick. With a thud Ricky's father set the box, and himself, down in a chair, and began to read the paper. Jay watched Ricky pick up the remains of the plates and bowls, then start sweeping. He worked slow, dragging the bristles across the floor, slapping the dirt, china, and food underneath the kitchen counter.

"What's up?" asked Jay.

"Hey," Ricky responded, despondent.

"What's up?"

"It's—We're—Nothing."

"How convincing."

Jay watched Ricky's face darken. He went to speak, wanting to make amends for his comment, but Ricky stopped him. "Wait here," he said before dashing up the stairs, a spark in his eyes.

Jay leaned over the counter and looked around. The house's signature—a lingering hint of lemongrass—was gone. All around lay manila burdens of cardboard, packed with memories, dishes, and garbage, glaring at Jay. He peered back at them, feeling a tickling fear creep behind his ears. Ricky didn't need to say it, because Jay felt his internal cup dry: his happiness evaporated by uncertainty.

With a leap, Ricky landed on the kitchen floor before Jay. Tucking a baggy in his pocket, Ricky grabbed a lighter off of the counter and walked toward the living room. He tied his jacket around his waist and opened the door.

"And where do you think you're going?" Mr. Kirkpatrick asked, lowering his paper enough to glower over it.

"Out," Ricky replied.

"Did you ask Other Dad?"

"He's asleep. I didn't want to wake him."

"Ha! That must be why you were blasting your records."

"You gave them to me to listen to."

"Excuse me," he drawled. "How long?"

"I don't know."

"We've still got lots to do," Mr. Kirkpatrick said matter-of-factly, setting the Times down in his lap. He stared at Ricky, and glanced at Jay—once, twice.

Ricky sighed, and dropped his shoulders. "I know. It's one afternoon though."

"Fine. But you know the rules: be home when —,"

"When the street lamps come on," Ricky interrupted. "Don't talk to strangers. Don't smoke anything that's not pot. Smile. I'm not a kid anymore."

Rolling his eyes Mr. Kirkpatrick picked the paper from his lap and shook it back to life as the boys filed out. Ricky closed, and locked, the door, then shooed Jay off of the box-ridden porch.

They set off toward The Trails. Ricky pecked at the conversation. After they had walked past town the grasses—chattering over each other in the breeze—forced Ricky to swallow his words. Trying to seize the silence Jay turned and saw another scowl cloud Ricky's face.

"You know you can tell me anything," said Jay.

"I know."

"I mean you don't have to tell me everything, but if something was wrong," he trailed off.

Ricky gave Jay a half smile, then turned back toward The Trails. "I'm fine."

"Yeah, but if you weren't you could tell me. That's all I'm saying. I'm here for you. *Is everything ok?*" Jay persisted.

"I said I'm fine," Ricky responded, pursing his lips.

They walked for an hour. Jay was impressed. Ricky was not one for directions, and more than once had to retrace his steps. But he walked with an uncommon confidence.

Beige ranks of grass gave way to gnarled bushes, puckered with crimson berries. Walking along the dirt trail, Ricky and Jay stared ahead as the towering trees began to swallow the path. Their dark branches, awash with vermilion and amber leaves, shivered in the fall wind as the sun draped their trunks with heavy, autumn shawls. The quick changing seasons always stormed the woods. Ricky stopped, nodded at the side of the road, and ducked into a nook. Jay followed, wresting his shoulders through the brush's tendrils.

Jay saw Ricky slide down an earthen lip toward a pond of slimy, stagnant water, abuzz with flies and mosquitos. The pit, yawning into the void, was stacked with piles of trash. Ricky grabbed a stick and made a beeline for the pond, determined to pull a mysterious lump from the muck. Cautious, Jay watched from afar, waiting to go down the hill. As Ricky lunged at the water, Jay studied its saggy shape, drifting listless through the murk. To Jay the floating, matted, gray coat was more sullen shipwreck than sordid beast.

"Holy shit," whistled Ricky.

Jay said nothing. He silently picked his way down the hill and brushed himself off as he walked toward Ricky, whose fruitless hooks had only managed to loosen the mysterious beast's hide.

"What is it?" Jay asked.

With one last lunge Ricky managed to snag the creature. Grunting, he yanked it on shore. "It's a wolfhound."

Its fetid odors were inescapable on land, and shot through Jay's sinuses. He walked away to clear his head and threw up behind a pile of rubble. Jay shivered and felt the warmth drain from him and replace with it a cold, hollow feeling that rooted through his body. Standing up made him feel dizzy, but he staggered back to Ricky, who had left the dog to dry. He stared at the beast. It was rancid, and bloated with time.

"What are we doing here?" Jay asked.

"We're making memories."

"You're stupid. This is disgusting."

"You always vomit," Ricky retaliated. He looked Jay up and down and began digging in his pockets.

"I want to go. This is dumb."

"We do this every day."

"We haven't done this all summer. I'm done looking at corpses." Jay pointed at the skeletal coat of fur, and the swarming flies. "This? This is fucked up."

"Jay, wait. It's not that gross. Just. Give me a minute."

"No. I'm going," Jay decided.

"Shut up," Ricky shushed.

Jay knew Ricky was leaving. "I didn't want to spend my last days with you like this."

Ricky stopped, and stood. For a minute he collected himself, then started to fish in his pockets again. He dug until he yanked out the lighter and a baggie full of small balls with fuses. Pulling out a red, one inch sphere, he handed it to Jay and chose a similar one himself. Jay weighed it in his hand, and felt its power. A simple bead filled with wrath and intensity that he could never possess.

Jay was holding a storm.

“Are these cherry bombs?” he asked, feeling the glow return.

“I found them in my grandpa’s attic,” said Ricky, “and he just let me take them.”

“Your dads didn’t stop you?”

Ricky smirked, turned, and started walking to a broken cement wall. Lighting a bomb, he tossed it at a pile of bottles in the distance and ducked behind it.

“What the hell, dude?” Jay cried. He sprinted to Ricky and scrambled behind the slab.

Peering skyward at the *Pop!* they saw the curious twinkle of glass paint a fractured portrait against the clouds.

“Now you,” Ricky said, offering the black Bic to Jay.

Jay hesitated. He thought about Ricky. About him leaving, but never even telling him. The breeze threw his thin black hair into his face. He sniffled and held the ball out to Ricky, silencing the storm. “I don’t want to.”

“Here,” Ricky ignored, lighting the flame under Jay’s fuse. It hissed to life, the wick curling from the heat. Jay tossed it into the water and watched it shoot a flume into the air. It cascaded back to the pit, producing a faint rainbow against the trees. It smelled like rain, like the past. Jay stared as the water misted the ground: soft tears on the earth.

“Another?” Ricky asked, jiggling the bag.

Jay shook his head and stood up, walking away. “I want to go home.”

“We just got here, Jay.”

“So?”

“So let’s stay and keep doing what we’re doing,” Ricky insisted.

“What are we doing here?”

“We’re having fun. We’re doing what we normally do over the summer.”

“Maybe you are.”

“You aren’t having fun?”

“No! You’ve been acting different all day. All summer. You want to keep playing with this dead thing. None of this feels right.”

“What do you mean?”

The question bounced off Jay’s back. He scraped his feet and hands along the ravine, scrambling to get out. He heard the lighter click, the fuse hiss, and the soft whistle of a cherry bomb just to his right. It went off, aggressive and industrial, and spat a cloud of dirt into the air.

“What the hell?” Jay asked shielding his eyes on his ass.

“What do you mean? You said it doesn’t feel right.”

“So you tried to kill me?”

“Stop ignoring the question.” Ricky grabbed several bombs from the bag and stuffed them back in his pocket. Before Jay could leave, Ricky pulled out a deep grape ball, *The Violet Hurricane*, lit it, and chucked the bomb closer to him. Scurrying away, feeling a boil begin, Jay dashed toward a palm-sized rock. He scooped it up and hurled it at Ricky, as another *Pop!* pierced the air. It struck him square in the chest. With a groan he dropped the baggy and lighter, and staggered back.

Rushing forward Jay leapt on the Bic and bombs, and yanked out a little, pink kiss.

He torched the fuse and tossed it toward Ricky, who smacked it out of the air into a pile of beer cans, and braced for the blow. A small *Crack!* tore the air and spat the cans everywhere. Jay lit another and tossed it behind Ricky, who flung himself onto the ground. Ricky furiously started searching for another lighter.

*Pop!*

He patted his pants and shirt and jacket, spitting out the dirt thrown upon him by the explosion. With a triumphant shriek he tore a shining red Zippo from his pocket. With a swish Ricky held the flame in his hand, then to a cherry-sized *Maroon Typhoon*. He tossed it over his shoulder and plugged his ears, the shriek of the explosion shaking Ricky’s short frame.

“Fuck you, Ricky!” Jay spat, chucking his last bomb toward Ricky’s shivering body.

Tearing at the ground Ricky lifted himself from the earth and jumped away from the *Snap!*

“I’m gonna kill you, Jay.”

“You can’t even tell me you’re leaving, you pussy. And I’m your best friend.”

Growling, Ricky lit the last bomb in his hand, a brilliant red dwarf with an extra long fuse, and pitched it toward Jay, who caught it in return. Smirking in triumph, Jay stared as the fuse shriveled slow under the sparkling flame. Then, eyes wide, Jay began to hustle in place. He screamed and looked at Ricky, who spat out some blood. He boiled inside, brimming over in bubbling rage. Before it could blow off his hand Jay threw it back at Ricky who caught it with a shriek. They continued their game of hot potato trying to get rid of the bomb, their hearts flying. Denying the final throw Jay smacked it away, then dashed toward Ricky, who collided with him. Entangled in one another, they traded soft blows to their heads, chests, and arms. Unbeknownst to the both of them, the dwarf, destined to cleanse, landed square in the hound’s caved in chest.

“What’s your problem?” gasped Ricky.

“What’s my problem? What’s my *problem*? My problem is I’m always sad and they lowered my dosage. My problem is that I’m going to lose my best friend and he won’t even tell me. I’m going to lose the only good thing I have left in this neighborhood. I’m going to miss you, and I don’t miss anyone! Not even my dad.” Jay cried, dueling and scrapping with Ricky in the dirt.

“My dad... It was unexpected, we —”

*Crack!*

Ricky and Jay, sprawled on the ground, watched as the wolfhound erupted—a fiery burst followed by a shower of gore. Jay had bubbled over and felt himself drain in awe.

They laid in the blast-zone. A glorious storm had come through and drenched them, washing away their voices, their hate, their fear. Sitting up, Jay felt the sun cake on the remains of the dog. Ricky, pacified, stared at the cloudless sky. They stayed for what felt like hours, turned to stoned by their own bewilderment.

“My dad isn’t in remission anymore. About a week now” Ricky said, peeling a dried hunk of fur off of his arm.

“Ricky.”

“I know. I should have told you. But damn it, Jay.”

“Where are you going?”

“Maine. We’re going to stay with my grandparents until...” Ricky stopped.

“And then?”

Ricky sat up and chewed on his lip. Jay stared at him. He didn’t need to say it out loud.

“Ok. When do you leave?”

“A week. They told me this morning.”

“But we talked this—,”

“They sat me down. Told me we weren’t just moving across town anymore. I had just hung up the phone.”

Mute, Jay looked at Ricky. “Will I ever see you again?”

Ricky stared at the sky. Jay followed his gaze. Together they watched a flock of birds fly south together, united. Jay relaxed with a sigh, sprawling out on the dirt. They stayed and watched the sun, languid and lumbering, sink into the horizon.

Later, Ricky took off toward the trees with Jay in tow. They scrambled up the dirt bank and began trekking home. The bushes slapped their legs and chests, and rustled with their footsteps. The trees gazed down at them, their knotty boughs filled with the hum of the day.

Jay began to cackle at his own disgust. He looked over himself and Ricky, saw the dried terror splattered across their faces, and laughed into the trees. He laughed as Ricky giggled with him, and then when his tears started to streak his dirty cheeks. He snorted and guffawed at the sounds of his misery. Glancing

up Jay saw Ricky crying, too. They took a step toward one another under the fall branches and felt the melody of the trees grow with their laughter. Soft, light, Ricky lifted his hand and wiped a stain of blood and beast from Jay's nose, and followed it with a soft kiss. Taking Ricky's grimy face in his hands and kissing him hard, Jay listened to the music of the woods. They connected, crying together in the chilled, evening air. Breathless, they pulled apart, and held one another close. Their breathing, heavy and excited, began to settle back down into a contented bliss.

On the way home, Ricky held Jay's hand. Together, in the fading of the day, they glowed.

Standing on the oak porch steps Jay kissed Ricky's cheek and smiled goodbye. Ricky waved to Jay as he turned toward home. Glancing at a lost dog poster as he walked past, Jay smiled drunk in the street lamps, feeling more radiant than ever before. With his warmth coursing through him, Jay strolled home to a house whose doors had once been rotted by time; to a house whose backyard had witnessed his first kiss; and to a house whose walls were intertwined with golden threads of memory. Deep down Jay knew that these feelings must exist within everyone, or else he wouldn't love his parents, or the beautiful brown skinned girl in his math class, or Ricky. So he took his warmth and held it to himself, a blanket from the drier, and felt that instant capture on his reel of the past.

The rest of the week passed too quickly, as all yearning fall days do. But time, and disease, forced the two of them to accept the limited beauty offered graciously to them by the soft, autumn world. When the time came it was morning, before the trees awoke. Ricky placed a letter in Jay's mailbox, pleading that the distance would not erase their new connection. *And many more to come*, he falsely promised. Ricky stared at Jay's still room from the street. Ricky's car drove into the sunrise long before Jay would wake up, realizing too late his alarm had not been set.

Jay would never mention these moments to anyone. The two exchanged letters for weeks. Until one day. A small, vermilion letter addressed to Franklin "Jay" Thomas arrived the day before the grieving town of Wells, Maine held a funeral for Enrique Ricardo Kirkpatrick. Jay would realize two months later, walking The Trails, that it was the last letter of its kind.

Even so, every once in awhile—when the moon shone bright and nostalgia hung heavy in the air—he would relive that day in his mind. Franklin "Jay" Thomas would paint it with vivid crimsons and catastrophic explosions, and revel in the haunting beauty of the past, forgetting his problems for just one moment. And then, as if on cue, he would glow.



## Binge by Zack Anderson

**H**ers was never a face you'd expect to see leering at you from the back seat of a squad car, bleary-eyed, and hollow like a jack o'lantern. She was the girl next door, the cheerleader, the kind of dame you'd be glad to bring home to mother. But mothers all over the world wept in solidarity as she was escorted from the crime scene that had once been her apartment, to the police station, where any number of unimagined horrors laid in wait.

Solemnly, she stared out at the passing city. The cars, the lights, and the people all became one blur of ominous shapes and dancing colors. But she wasn't really staring at them, nor did the fleeting images register for more than a second in her weary mind. Behind those bloodshot eyes, a separate cavalcade of sights, and sounds was rising in intensity. There was no rhyme or reason, no distinction of any sort to the scenes she saw. There was something . . . oddly delightful about the images, something all at once soothing and grating.

Shapes, sounds, colors – they all blended into a beautiful catastrophe. Once, the thoughts had existed only in the annals of her mind. She'd been alive then, tethered as we all are to the outside world. But now the cord was cut, the connection was lost, and the signal was out of range.

Sitting in the back of the police cruiser, watching her life fade away in the rear-view mirror, she didn't care to remember how exactly she'd come to this point. Even if she tried, the memories were most likely lost, adrift somewhere out of her reach. There was one thing she still could recall, however. One memory that hadn't yet withered away.

She could remember how it all began.

#

He had told her they'd see the world together. Grow old together. They'd get through it all – the pain, the love, the loss, the adventure – as long as they were together.

Apparently, somewhere along the way, he'd changed his mind. After three years of blissful partnership, he gathered his things and left their shared apartment, leaving nothing behind save for a hastily written note.

In it, he offered no explanation. He apologized, wished her well, and assured her that their paths would never cross again. At the bottom, he'd signed the letter not "Ford" as she'd always known him but, "Tom Pickett," his given name.

Hers was Angie Newton. She was twenty-six years old, and lived what most would consider a very ordinary life. She worked a boring job as a secretary, drove a boring car to and from, and had her rent check signed, and bills paid by the first of every month.

But her unremarkable world collapsed in on itself when Ford left. At first, she didn't know how to respond. They said ice cream and Bon Iver could soften the sting, but neither filled the hole that had formed within her. She felt empty, lost, alone like a sailor out at sea.

Work became difficult. She could hardly focus, much less wear a smile and whistle a happy tune. She went home determined to use her weeks of built-up sick time to recover, rebuild, and recuperate. When she returned to work, she'd be herself again, for better or worse.

With so many empty days ahead, the need quickly arose for something, anything, with which she could occupy herself. And so, at a loss for ideas, she found herself curled up on her sofa, staring across the living room at her darkened television.

They'd bought the TV together, though neither had really made much use of it. It was just what you did, buy a television. Everyone had one; to live without was to be different, to be an outsider.

When it came to TV, there weren't nearly as many options available as you're probably used to. Hell, there weren't any options at all. The entire world was entertained by a single program, which was distributed by a single network, which was owned, like most everything else, by the Daley Corporation.

This lone TV show had been dominating the airwaves for a long time. As it was on three-hundred and sixty-five days a year, there seemed no chance of it losing its place in the near future. It didn't have a name. Some people referred to it, and the television itself, collectively as "The Tube"; others called it "The Lights," or "The Sights."

But most people called it "The Omnibox."

It was difficult to explain what you saw when you looked into the Omnibox. Words couldn't really do it justice. Images – some recognizable, others abstract beyond rationalization – came and went with jarring speed. The colorful sights were accompanied by a multitude of sounds, which varied from ambient noise, to harsh static, to what almost resembled musical notes.

Were there nothing more to the Omnibox, it would've been rather unremarkable. But it wasn't just the images or the sounds that captured the interest of so many. Watching it, listening to it, even just having it on in the back of the room could make you feel . . . different. There was something about it, an almost addictive quality that made it hard to stop watching once you'd started. It changed your mind, altered your attitude, turned a bad day into a good one, and a good one into great.

Angie, unlike most of the population, had never much cared for the Omnibox. Her interests had always laid in the physical world – what she could touch, what she could feel. But, alone and despondent as she was, and without much else to keep herself busy, she opted to switch on the box and give in to the popular temptation.

She snatched the remote up off of the coffee table. Its plastic surface was marred only by a single button – a red, on-off switch. She aimed the remote at the TV and switched it on. Instantly, the empty screen gave way to a slew of ethereal images. Colors swirled to an unheard beat, dimming and brightening at odd intervals. At first, Angie was unamused by the display, but after a few minutes, she began to see the appeal.

To say the effects were instantaneous would be something of an exaggeration. But not by much. Already, her spirits were lifted slightly, as the calming effect of the OmniBox took its hold. Where there had been sorrow, there was now melancholy. Where there had been darkness, there was now a dim light, like kindling just beginning to catch flame.

Angie watched for about thirty minutes, her eyes glued to the screen. She stopped only when she became aware of how hungry she felt. It was a minor miracle; the desire for food had eluded her since Ford had left.

She switched off the TV and, filled with a new found energy, rose from the sofa and hurried to the kitchen. Moments later she returned, her arms laden with whichever snacks she'd been able to hurriedly collect from the pantry.

She returned to the TV and collapsed onto the sofa. After settling back into her nest, she reached for the remote.

#

It had been two days since she'd left the apartment. At first, she'd been able to fit walks and trips to the market into her open schedule. But now, it seemed every hour was devoted to one thing, and one thing only. The television was almost always on. Even when she left the room, Angie liked to leave it running. The sound alone was enough to keep her mind occupied. It reminded her of the euphoria the box could provide – if only she'd let it.

Sometime during the latter half of the day, her peaceful seclusion was interrupted by someone knocking on the door. Initially, Angie believed the sound to be another product of the tube. It wasn't until nearly a minute had passed – and the knocking persisted – that she realized she had a visitor.

She turned down the volume slightly, and then went to the door. A dampened voice was shouting at her from the other side, calling her name. With a grumble, Angie opened the door a crack, and to her surprise, was greeted by Marcus – one of her coworkers.

“Marcus,” said Angie, with a frown, “what are you doing here?” Marcus’ face – sagging, like that of a bloodhound – lit up when Angie appeared. “Angie!” he exclaimed, blushing slightly. “I . . . uh . . . I haven’t seen you at work in a while. Thought I’d stop by and check in – see how things are going.”

Angie sighed, opening the door a little wider. “I don’t remember giving you my address.”

“Well, actually, I got it from Ford,” said Marcus. He was clearly uncomfortable. “I heard what happened between you and him by the way. Hope you’re holding up alright.”

“I’m doing fine,” said Angie, sternly. “Terrific, actually.” Marcus nodded. Suddenly, his face contorted into a look of horror. He brought a finger to the corner of his eye. “Sorry Angie, you’ve . . . uh . . . you’ve got a little something there.” Angie wiped at her eye, then examined her fingertip. A smear of blood coated the print. Confused, she looked again at Marcus, who now bore an expression of slight disgust.

“Uh, Angie?” he asked, quietly. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

But she was distracted, beckoned back into her apartment by something inexplicable. “I told you; I’m fine,” she muttered, closing the door in Marcus’ face.

She paused, watching the tube from across the room. After a moment’s struggle, she managed to break free from its grip and flee to the bathroom. There she stood, before the sink, staring at her reflection in the mirror. She hardly recognized herself. Her face looked pale and drawn, and her eyes were bloodshot. Her hair hung in matted strands, lending her a perpetually bedraggled appearance.

Leaning in, she could see the tiniest drop of blood trickling down from the corner of her eye. She moved to wipe it away, but noticed something in the mirror before she could. Slack-jawed, she stared at the mirror, marveling as all around her the colors of the tube began to swirl and collide, filling the void around her reflection.

She saw herself enveloped in delightful, flickering flames of varying shades. Soon, it was more than scenery. When she opened her mouth, out poured a swirl of rainbow-colored mists. She was engulfed by the bright fog; seconds later, she and it were one.

Angie did not walk back to her living room. She glided, as forces unknown ferried her to the sofa. She didn’t know what they wanted, specifically – only that they wanted what was best for her. And she wanted it too. For she knew, without a doubt, what was best. The OmniBox.

#

She'd been living in isolation for nearly a week. Still, she continued to watch the tube from her nest on the sofa. The shades were drawn and the lights were off. All light, all sound, all *life* in the apartment came from the OmniBox.

It was undergoing change however, gradual though it may have been. After just a few days, the abstract assortment of shapes and sounds on the screen began to coalesce, merging and folding in on itself until, after much anticipation, the image of a man was almost apparent.

It was just a rough shape, a crude sketch but still an undeniable likeness. Devoid of face or features, this man seemed to emerge – slowly – from the tube itself, growing larger and more predominant until Angie felt he could be in the room with her.

And just as the images merged, so too did the sounds. Before long, what had once been a symphony of disparate noises began to materialize into something recognizable. It almost sounded to Angie like a man's voice.

For hours, the featureless man spoke in agonizing gibberish, trying it seemed to reach Angie without uttering a single, real word. The being's speech matured quickly, and soon she could detect discernible words in the broadcast, words that sounded as though they were meant for her alone.

First, it called out her name, over and over, never stopping, even after she'd begun screaming at the OmniBox in response. Then, for a while, it was quiet. She thought the featureless man might disappear, dissolve back into the puddle of shapes he'd been born from. But as her doubts reached their pinnacle, the man's voice boomed loudly. Gone was his nonsense vocabulary; now, he spoke in plain English.

"Do you hear me?" he asked. His voice was garbled, laced with static and wavering in pitch.

"Yes," Angie droned, nodding frantically.

"Do you see me?" the OmniBox asked, after a pause.

"Yes, yes I can see you," Angie cried. She was leaned forward, staring intently at the man in the box.

Suddenly, the screen darkened, and the man's image dimmed until he was little more than a shimmer. Angie nearly cried out in fear at his apparent departure. But then, in a low, gentle voice, he asked another question.

"Angie . . . do you *trust* me?"

She fell from the couch, onto her knees before the coffee table. "Yes, yes," she murmured, "yes, of *course* I trust you!"

She felt warm, as the tube's gentle grasp exceeded its prison-like box. It reached across the room, cradling her in a loving embrace. She could trust it; she'd never been more certain of anything in her entire life. The OmniBox knew nothing of the failings of love, or the destruction fraught by man. It knew only truth, in its purest sense.

Angie wouldn't sleep that night. There was no need for it. She'd remain seated on her couch, absorbed in the glow of the OmniBox. There she'd wait with wide eyes for further communication. The images, the colors – they'd keep her entertained, keep her occupied.

It was better than dreaming. Inside the box there were no nightmares.

#

The man continued to appear, evolving from a simple human shape into something more corporeal. Eventually, features – human features – began to stand out. A crop of brown hair, a slim physique – Angie almost thought she recognized the man in the box. Of course, that was nonsense. She would remember meeting such a man. How could she forget?

Certainly, she'd never be able to forget him now.

And, as the man continued to materialize, he continued to speak. Sometimes he spouted only crazed ramblings; more often than not he would merely growl Angie's name, as if checking to ensure she was still there, still watching him. On rare occasions, he'd ask questions, mostly concerning her loyalty to him.

Angie stayed, loyal indeed until the end of the earth. But something – little more than a whisper in the wind – began to ebb at her mind. It continued to bother her, this incomprehensible nagging – trying, it seemed, to tear her mind from the box's grasp. She fought, ignoring the world around her, until the whisper turned to a shout and she was forced to turn away.

Clear-headed for the first time in days, Angie listened, hearing much to her chagrin the ringing of her telephone. Disgruntled, she walked to the kitchen and answered it. "Hello?" she said, but for a moment there was only silence on the other end.

"Angie?" called a voice, a voice she'd never hoped – or expected – to hear again.

"Ford," Angie whispered, in disbelief.

There was another pause.

"It's me, Angie." Angie held the phone like a vice. "What do you want, Ford?" she asked, slowly.

"I – I'm sorry, Angie . . ."

"It's a little late for that," Angie snarled.

"Late for what?" asked another voice. It wasn't Ford. It sounded like Marcus.

"Marcus, is that you?"

"Yeah, I'm here. Sorry, but late for what?" "Marcus, uh . . . is Ford there with you?" Again, she was met with silence. "Hello, is anyone there?" she asked, growing impatient.

Marcus' voice emerged from the abyss. "Angie, listen to me. . ." he began, "you need to get. . ." He cut out abruptly. All Angie could hear was the tone. Confused, she set down her phone. She lingered in the kitchen, waiting for the phone to ring again. It never did. Another voice – that of the man in the box – called to her, from the other room.

"Don't listen to them," it said.

Hurriedly, Angie returned to the living room. The man in the box looked just short of complete – like a man skinned alive. He was all muscle and veins, dripping with ghastly fluids. It should have been unnerving, but for some reason, it wasn't. "What are you talking about?" Angie asked.

"Don't let them fool you," the man warned. "They don't want what's best for you." "I know that," said Angie.

"They'll keep intervening," said the muscle-man.

"I won't listen."

"You'll have to, Angie. They'll make you listen."

Suddenly, on Angie's face there formed a wicked grin. "Then I'll make them leave me alone."

#

She forgot about Marcus' intrusion. Ford, too, was no more than a distant memory. In silent wonder Angie waited and watched, as the man in the box continued to resemble something alive. From the ground up, his bloody form was encased in flesh. Gradually, the skin worked its way up his body, coating his feet, his legs, his waist.

All the while, Angie observed the process as though in a trance. This finished product of the OmniBox, constructed of strange forces and bound in human flesh, would be perfect. The perfect man, the perfect specimen. More than an image, but something real, something tangible. This man would be the perfect creation. The real and the virtual, joined in harmonious synchronicity.

And while Angie watched, he spoke to her, reminded her of his importance, forbade her from leaving him. But she didn't need to hear any of it. She couldn't dream of abandoning him. Couldn't imagine anything more important. If anything, she wanted to join him.

By the time the skin had wrapped itself around the man's shoulders, Angie began to feel a troubling familiarity toward the creation. It was more than a sensation. As she studied the canvas of the man's newly-created torso, she noticed several marks – a scar near the hip, a blemish below the shoulder. Both she recognized as belonging to Ford.

She stared in horror as the man's face affixed itself. There was no doubting it now. It was more than a resemblance. It was Ford's face she was looking

at. He was smiling at her like he used to smile at her. But his eyes . . . there was something different about his eyes.

This wasn't what Angie had expected. More than disappointed, she was perplexed. Why would the box think this was what was best for her? Ford was the last human alive that she wanted to see. All she could do was sneer in obvious disgust as the creation reached out its hand.

"Angie," he said. His voice was no longer garbled. "Come. Join me."

All around him lights flashed and stars danced about the room. But his outstretched hand held no appeal. Angie did not see the beautiful fusion she'd anticipated, the perfect specimen that the box had promised. She saw only the creator of her misery, the man who'd abandoned her without a word and led her into this depression.

"No," she said, standing in defiance. "I'm not going anywhere with you." Ford shook his head, his smile never fading. "Please," he said, "I know what's best for you."

But he didn't. And neither did the OmniBox. The simple arrogance on display made Angie tremble with anger. The man believed he had control over her, but he was wrong. And he was going to learn.

Bellowing in rage, Angie leaped over the sofa and made a break for the kitchen, where she hastily armed herself with the heaviest knife she could find. She was ready, all-too ready to make him pay. But when she returned to the living room, Ford was gone. She spun around madly, waiting for him to pop out of the shadows. But he never appeared. Angie turned then on the OmniBox. Its screen was dark, devoid even of the simple images that had entranced her so long ago.

There came a knock. With her knife hidden behind her back, Angie crept to the door. She opened it a crack, and saw no one. She opened it further, and there he was. Ford stood in the hallway, naked, still smiling. He reached out to touch her face, his smile widening.

She wouldn't let him touch her. He was so close now. Growling, Angie revealed her knife, and in one swift motion, plunged it into his chest. Still smiling, Ford looked down at the bloodless wound. He looked back at Angie, and collapsed onto the floor.

Suddenly, she was surrounded by whispers. Her neighbors stood around, peering out from their doorways. They looked in fright at the dead man. But they didn't know what Angie knew. They didn't know who he was.

Satisfied, and finally at ease, Angie looked down at her ex-lover. But it wasn't Ford she saw, lying on the ground. It was Marcus. His gaze was fixed blankly on the ceiling above. The knife protruded from his chest. The blood had spread, staining most of his shirt red.

As she fell to her knees, numb to her neighbors, to the sound of sirens closing in, Angie could hear a voice calling from inside her apartment. "I



know what's best for you," it said, in that familiar, garbled tone. "I know what's best."

#

The numbness never went away. Through trials, and interrogations, Angie remained stoic and stern, and nigh-unresponsive. Terms were thrown around, like "unknown side-effects" and "over-exposure." And someone said something about her brainwaves. Or so she thought. It became difficult to keep track, after a while.

Tears were shed before her, and sentences were made. She apologized for the crime she knew she'd committed, but she knew she didn't sound sincere. Something else was responsible for what she'd done. It wasn't her fault; she hadn't meant to kill Marcus. She felt only anger, at whatever had been pulling her strings.

The box – soon she began to crave the box. But they decided it wasn't good for her. Angie was sent somewhere, with white walls and big windows, where there were no screens, no buttons. Not even a telephone.

They thought it was gone. They thought she'd recover. But Angie realized, before long, that she didn't need the box. It had imparted upon her its essence, itself, so to speak. When she closed her eyes, or stared off into space, she could see him – that shimmering man. She could hear his voice, too, reminding her of all they hoped she'd forget.

"Don't listen to them," it would say, of her doctors, and the orderlies. "They don't know what's best, Angie."

"But you do," Angie would reply.

"I do," it would agree. "Be ready. They'll try to make you listen."

And Angie would smile.

"Don't worry. I'll make them stop."

## In the Garden

by Anna Badger

**T**he pavement rushes up to embrace me, knocks some sense into my tired, broken bones. I smell iron, can taste it too and the night air freezes the tip of my nose. I get up slowly, move my arms out in front and then get my feet untangled to push myself up.

I'm in my small, suburban neighborhood and I take a step forward, moving unsteadily along the sidewalk, back to my home through the night. It is almost completely dark out now, the only light source coming from the yellow-orange glow of the street lamps. The homes, which during the day are reliably dull and cookie-cutter, have morphed overnight into hunched gargoyles preying on passersby with bright, unyielding eyes and sharp wrought iron teeth. The wind blows, shaking the leaves of the palm trees that line the streets, and biting down through the cloth of my thin polo shirt.

With arms already crossed, I rub my hands along my upper arms, willing myself warmer, but I forgot to bring a sweater. The entirety of my face is slick with perspiration and I have a splitting headache. My knee bleeds profusely from my earlier tumble onto the cement, and I clench my jaw tighter to prevent my teeth from chattering.

I see my neighbor, Mr. Lapin, in the distance, a meddling old man in his eighties. He's out in his garden as he always is at this time of night. My wife, a botanist and gardener, always had something to say about his lack of knowledge: "If he knew what plants worked well with this ecosystem and how to landscape, he might not have to work on his garden 24/7," she would always tease, looking out the window and stopping her nightly perusal of a magazine. She and Mr. Lapin shared a mutual understanding of loathing and suspicion.

I'm a patrol officer, and I typically work the late shift, so my neighbor and I are always having a late night chat. People like me. Just knowing that I'm out there watching over everyone makes my neighbors feel safe.

Mr. Lapin stands up to wave to me, and he smiles a wide toothy grin, but I see his eyes flash with something—was his look accusatory? And his eyes gleam red, reflecting the swell of the full moon. Startled, I look away, walking quickly across the street to my home.

When I look up to my home I see the tree in our front yard has completely consumed the entirety of the house. Gnarled branches fall heavily onto the top of the roof and into shattered windows. The beautiful garden that Alice has so loving cared for is completely overrun, weeds growing wildly amongst the sage, lilac, snapdragons and petunias. The paint around the door and windows has been heavily stained and chipped. I had hardly been gone at all—maybe one or two hours?

I turn back to my neighbor, but he has gone inside. I go to take my phone out, but discover that I don't have one on me. I must have left it in my car, but I can't remember where I parked it. I don't know where I've been and the harder I try to remember the more my head throbs.

I begin walking toward the open sore that used to be a front door, stepping over roots and crouching down below branches that droop to the ground with the weight of gravity. The shrubs and flowers crunch beneath my feet as I walk by. Suddenly I hear something above me in the tree, a sound reminiscent of a cackle.

I stop, looking up into the tree and a black blur comes hurdling down at me. The blur—which I discover with relief is our cat—has catapulted herself down at me from a branch above. Landing gracefully on my shoulder, she digs her nails deep into my skin before leaping off me and running inside.

"Damn," I swear, rubbing my shoulder. I step inside our home, carefully setting down one foot at a time so that I don't make too much noise. All of our eclectic furniture is here, but moss and branches have covered the light switch by the door. The only light comes from the tv, on which a recording I made of Alice a couple of months ago plays. She beams at me from the screen as she prepares food in the kitchen.

"Alice!" I call out for her, worried that she has been hurt.

I open our shared bedroom door where our cat has disappeared. Our bed is as I left it, with my taser gun on the edge. The floor and ceiling crawl with dark red shadows everywhere, they move across the bedroom floor to me ebbing and flowing like the tide, pouring in from the open windows off the branches and leaves.

"Alice!" I call again, but my head starts throbbing when I open my mouth too wide, and when I reach out to massage my temples, there is a pain so sharp that I recoil my hand at once. I stumble and trip over my own feet, falling to the floor. I bring my hands out to catch myself, but somehow I am too slow and my hands only just make it in time to shield my head from the impact.

The world is slower down here on the floor and for a while the red shadows comfort me as they swirl about like pinwheels, soothing and relaxing my throbbing head. Then I catch sight of the cat under the bed, her eyes glowing like my neighbor's. She knows.

It comes back to me in flashes: Alice with a woman in her garden, the two of them running back into my bedroom and trying to lock themselves in, my boiling hot anger, tasing the bitch and then coming back in with a knife, Alice threatening me with her gardening spade, and then her slamming it down into my head.

I call out for help, scrambling up to my feet as quickly as my heavy limbs allow, but I've been ensnared by the shadows and they reach out to me with crimson, sinewy hands to pull me under the bed where my cat begins to

smile a wider and wider grin with human teeth and one chipped front tooth. They're Alice's teeth—and the one I broke.

The cat cackles at me like a woman and I strike at it hard, releasing the inky red clouds back to the ground, where they rematerialize as blood. I manage to get up and move away from the bed when the damn cat bolts out of the bedroom door, hissing and spitting at me.

I make my way through the blood that flows about the ground. It cannot touch me in its liquid form. I go to my bedside, where underneath the stand I keep a flashlight, handy for stormy nights when the power would go out.

I reach in, and take it out, switching it on. I reach the bathroom door, turn the knob and walk in.

The tiles are streaked with dirt and mud and there are lilies growing in the corner where Alice had been planting them. Mold grows thickly around every corner, but especially on the walls. The more I look the more there is, the more mushrooms sprout, flowers grow, and ivy creeps up the walls. Carnations, daffodils, tulips, roses, sunflowers, marigolds, all begin surrounding the lilies.

I move toward the tub, and see her floating there, spade in hand, with a deep gash in her chest, surrounded and ensnared completely by murky water and roots, most of her body hidden by lotus flowers.

Then I turn and catch sight of my reflection in the mirror. I see the place where she hit me—there's a deep root growing out of the place that's been hurting so much. A flower has started to bloom and I claw at it desperately, to get the roots out of my head. It can't start spreading out to my brain or I'll forget that I need to bury Alice with her lover.

I knew in the back of my head that something had been blossoming between the two of them, but it wasn't until tonight that I'd witnessed it. I can do a lot of damage with just a stun gun and a knife. I was never going to hurt her though. She hurt me, jamming her spade right into my head, but I never did anything to her. And now she's going to make me bury her.

I bend down and reach underneath her neck and thighs with my arms to try and lift her from the water, but when I attempt to pull her up from the pond, the lotus flowers grow taller and wrap more strongly around her. I readjust my position so that I can brace myself against the side of the pond while I pull at her body. This time the flowers give way and I hear the roots snap as her body collapses into mine and suddenly there is so much blood flowing out of her wound, soaking my shirt and flowing down to the soil where the plants greedily consume it.

Reinvigorated by Alice's life, the plants begin to grow faster and with more force than before, shooting out from the soil violently. Their stems and leaves reach out for me, refusing to let me go, as their thorns prick at my skin, threatening to impale me.

Alice's body is wrestled from my arms and disappears as the garden overtakes her body and they become the same; they were the same all along. I struggle frantically against the snares but my struggles seem to entice them to crush my body with greater vehemence until I can feel a vine wrap around my throat.

But there is nothing I can do; Alice is too strong for me.

Before my vision begins to fade I think I hear Mr. Lapin shouting and banging on the bathroom door. He's saying something about calling the police, about Alice being dangerous. My vision turns splotchy as I hear sirens go off somewhere in the distance.

## Roxana: A Contemporary Analysis to an Eighteenth Century Voice for Women's Rights by Kendra Gardner

**A**s a woman in the twenty-first century, it is difficult to imagine a world in which I have no power or influence: a world where I am merely a man's daughter or wife. Today, the control that I have over my decisions and my possessions is a right that I see as natural: a right given to me when I first entered this world. In Daniel Defoe's story *Roxana*, Defoe takes the reader into the life of an eighteenth century woman who is fighting for her personal liberty. The character Roxana has seen a life of hardship as she was put to the streets after her first husband destroyed the family's fortune, and now Roxana feels a powerful force that drives her to hold on to the small estate that remains. With children to look after, she finds herself in a quandary that she needs to solve. To shelter her family and preserve her right to administer her personhood, she chooses to act as a courtesan to her landlord rather than become a wife to a new man. Through the story, Defoe demonstrates a feminist philosophy that challenges the social code for women in the eighteenth century by portraying a character that is passionately arguing against marriage. Roxana succeeds in obtaining a selfhood that is more free than that of a married woman by professing a single woman's natural and legal ability to manage her own affairs, identifying that giving up one's virtues to provide for one's family is more noble than giving up one's natural rights by marrying.

While lying in bed together, the landlord asks Roxana why she refuses to marry him – provoking her to reveal the deep-seated moral code of marriage that dwells within her. He tries to guess her reasoning, proposing her reasons are that she has either already promised another man that she will marry him or that she does not want to relinquish her possessions to the landlord. When Roxana reveals the truth, the landlord learns that she refuses not only due to the matter of money, but also stressing the matters of her personal freedom. She presents her view on the subject, stating that marriage is “nothing but giving up liberty, estate, authority, and everything to the man, and the woman was indeed a mere woman ever after – that is to say, a slave” (2427). The comparison of a wife to a slave is a simile that creates a driving connotation to reveal the severity of Roxana's beliefs on marriage. As a slave is subjected to every command of his or her master, a wife in the eighteenth century is a marionette to the husband: her actions and beliefs must be in line with his desire. The discussion of her refusal to marry continues after the landlord counter argues, insisting that he will grant her complete control over her property, declaring that there is no need to be concerned over losing her financial freedoms. His persistence does not sway

Roxana, who explains that the property will no longer legally be her own. Though the husband may allow the wife to act as the manager of the property, she will be forced to administer according to the husband's instructions.

As Roxana's persistence to stand against marriage shows her disobedience to eighteenth century standards for women, her ideology of women's innate abilities further challenges the social system of her time. She feels that women are born with the intellectual capacity to manage finances and personal decisions. To defend her belief that a woman should remain single to govern her own property, she explains, "while a woman was single, she was a masculine in her politic capacity; that she had then the full command of what she had, and the full direction of what she did," (2428). The argument that a single woman is as legally able as a man to sufficiently control herself and her property is one that is completely resistive of the norm of society because women at the time (single or betrothed) were not seen as equal to men, and did not have the opportunities to advance in society as a man had. The only social status that a woman was granted was the one she married into or was born into. According to Roxana, the only way for a woman to maintain a sense of free will is to preserve the finances that she had rather than risking a complete loss by renouncing the total of her property to a man through marriage. She argues that any woman with a large estate who marries is deserving of any hardships that may come to her as a consequence to her ignorance.

Although Roxana does not engage in her personal view of evil, which is marriage, she engages in social misconduct of another regard: sex before marriage. She has a family that she is responsible to take care of and she finds that the solution to her financial burden is to receive free rent from her landlord while repaying him with sexual acts. Though she feels that the moral action is to marry before having physical relationships with a man, she understands marriage to be the greater unethical action as it completely strips a woman of her freedoms of finance and surrenders her body completely to her husband. She tells the landlord that as she "could not reconcile my judgment to marriage... and [had] obligation too much on me to resist you, I suffered your rudeness and gave up my virtue" (2429). Roxana clearly finds her actions to be shameful in the eyes of society and does not feel pride in the deeds that she engages in, but feels that there is no other choice than the one that she has chosen. After losing all that she owned in her first marriage, Roxana is trapped between two decisions – both of which she finds to be injustices to her freedom and virtue. Analyzing her situation, one finds that she has selected the course that violates her freedom the least: acting as a courtesan. By soliciting her sexuality to another man, Roxana has secured a home for her family and has granted herself the rights to her property and the rights to her selfhood. While a married woman acts as sexual property to

her husband, Roxana's decision to act as a courtesan ensures more personal liberty than matrimony because she is free to choose who she sleeps with, controlling her body along with her property. As a courtesan, Roxana gains two authorities that a married woman does not have – her estate and her body – as she chooses who she sleeps with and who she does not.

In the eighteenth century, women were provided with few options in leading a fulfilled existence, as laws and social conduct fought to restrain a woman's abilities in the world. Throughout *Roxana*, Defoe presents a powerful position that is unique to its peers: a position that defends women. The character Roxana is ahead of her time in the argument for women's liberties, painting a picture of the path that a woman must take in order to find liberty in a society that rarely allows any. By upholding her stature as a single woman, she finds financial power in addition to her autonomy. Though life as a courtesan is not admired today, one can applaud Roxana in her efforts and her success in holding on to her sense of freedom to become more than a puppet to the male members of society.

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## New Show Pilot on Travel Channel: “Culturally Appreciative Foods” by Shiloh C. Green

“The best way to experience a culture is by digging a little deeper for your meal -- no matter how strange or where you find it,” says Andrew Zimmern, host of the show, “Bizarre Foods.” On the show, Zimmern says he tends to stray from the usual culinary adventures, “sampling tidbits that might seem a little bizarre to the average set of taste buds.” On this episode, Zimmern travels between Oaxaca and Mexico City tasting back alley delicacies such as octopus in Huatulco, roasted Armadillo in Oaxaca, and grasshoppers in Mexico City. While in Mexico, Zimmern is on the search for the most authentic Mexican food. In analyzing Zimmern’s expedition wrought in cultural exotification, I compare his travels to Khor’s comic on food cultural appropriation. While the former artifact informs the latter, both artifacts exhibit issues brought about by cultural appropriation and exotification. The latter suggests solutions and best practice for limiting these problematic behaviors. While this paper does not aim to suggest we cannot consume the cuisines of other cultures in which we do not reside, this paper does suggest there are ways of going about appreciating cultural cuisines that do not objectify or invalidate the people and experiences of those cultures — Visiting other cultures and calling their food “bizarre” is not one of them, nor is collecting gastronomical gold stars.

In Khor’s comic about food cultural appropriation, the antagonistic sidekick asks Khor, who identifies as Malaysian, where he can get the most “authentic” Malaysian food in town. It is in this moment, Khor questions what constitutes authenticity. When out for burritos another day, the friend points out the large presence of Latino folks, suggesting the restaurant’s high level of authenticity. “Because people make the best authenticity props,” mocks Khor. The antagonistic sidekick persists, “So! Malaysian food?” using Khor as a measure for the authenticity of local Malaysian cuisine — Khor’s stamp of approval. As Khor points out, authenticity is not simply the delicacies of a country, but the intervening years of colonialism, migration, and globalization, as well.

The antagonistic sidekick of the story fails to acknowledge Khor’s history and struggles as a first-generation American, as well as the history and cultural relevance of the food with which Khor was raised. The story’s sidekick was merely concerned with obtaining gastronomical gold stars on their cultural acquisition adventure. The antagonistic sidekick in Khor’s story materializes as Andrew Zimmern from “Bizarre Foods.” Zimmern’s work is problematic for a number of reasons, but this paper will focus on just four intersecting points: the show’s title, cultural appropriation, failure

to acknowledge centuries worth of oppression, and general paternalistic traits. The “Bizarre Foods” show title is potentially highly offensive. While Zimmern appears to *appreciate* various cultures, the connotations behind addressing foreign foods as “bizarre” implies judgement. Other words that come to mind might be “freak,” “ludicrous,” “wild.” These terms can all assume someone or something is untamed, uncontrollable, and nonconforming, and thus, negative and unnecessary. Not only does Zimmern’s language other cultures, but his sheer role as a food critic travel extraordinaire others cultures, as well.

Zimmern makes a living by literally consuming other cultures, and collecting bits of other culture along the way. During his time in Mexico City, Zimmern indulged in chapulines, salted and toasted grasshoppers, atop a crispy tortilla called a tlayuda. In an effort to demonstrate his cultural prowess and exhibit his gastronomical gold stars, Zimmern mentions, “you know, in other parts of the world, when I’ve had crickets or grasshoppers, they don’t lend a whole lot to the dish itself. Here, it just works beautifully.” In complimenting the dish in this way, Zimmern essentially credits the entire culture with cooking the grasshoppers in a way that meets his culinary standards, wherein other cultures have failed to cook grasshoppers in a way that meets his culinary standards. This exchange exhibits Zimmern’s innate paternalistic traits brought about by American culture.

As a white, middle class American who ventures into countries to report on their cuisine, Zimmern’s minute sample of the cultures he visits is not indicative of the culture as a whole. Though certain cultural foods have received Zimmern’s stamp of approval, Zimmern’s visits being portrayed as insider knowledge completely warp, exotify, and exploit local culture thus perpetuating American ignorance about worldly matters. For instance, Zimmern spends a short time in Huatulco free diving with various fisherpeople to catch shellfish and octopus. At one point, he gives the oysters they catch a monetary value -- how much they’d sell for at a five-star restaurant. By comparing the local industry to a materialistic five-star restaurant, while mentioning how few pesos the oysters would cost at a local restaurant, Zimmern both discredits the subsistence lifestyle of locals in Huatulco *and* diminishes the quality of the dish by mentioning its low value compared to its counter-dish in the states. Zimmern is so disillusioned by his narrow focus on Huatulco’s role in shellfish and octopus production, he fails to mention or even acknowledge Oaxaca’s turbulent history of colonialism and war. At some point, he does mention the Zapotecs, the indigenous group of Oaxaca, but only mentions their contribution to the local food, and how their contribution sets Oaxacan food apart from the rest of Mexico. In disregarding Oaxacan and Zapoteca history, Zimmern further ignores southern Mexico’s adversity and socio-

political turmoil, and objectifies the local culture for its, potentially stolen, service to the food world.

As a world traveler, Zimmern utilizes his show as a platform to not only offer foodie advice, but to advertise tourist opportunities wherever he visits. Oaxaca, according to Zimmern, is “best experienced outside of the popular tourist zones.” He asks the viewer, “Does [Mexico] conjure images of TexMex burrito joints or wild spring breaks?” With cow’s tongue tacos, 5-star chefs “serving up pre-hispanic indigenous cuisine,” Zimmern promises “there’s more to Mexico than meets the eye.” Oaxaca is evidently now worthy thanks to Zimmern’s seal of approval as a tourist destination. While in Oaxaca, Zimmern entertains roasted armadillo, indicating Juchitan is one of the few places left in the world to eat fresh armadillo cooked in its own shell. The added bonus, according to Zimmern, “is that it was cooked by native Zapoteca women using traditional recipes — now *that’s* authentic!” It seems Zimmern’s measure of authenticity has mostly to do with primitivity and original practice, which denotes an impossibly high standard for all cultural evolution occurring subsequently.

The antagonistic sidekick in Khor’s story shares a lot of characteristics with Andrew Zimmern. For one, both individuals fail to realize their appropriative tendencies. In Khor’s comic, the antagonistic sidekick, like Zimmern, exhibits his gastronomical prowess when declaring proudly, “this roti is the heart of Malaysia.” As if Khor’s birth country’s entire culture can be summed up into a single flatbread. Additionally, both individuals possess an astonishing amount of privilege in taking advantage of the opportunity to enjoy “foreign” food, all the while natives are historically ridiculed by Western culture for enjoying the same exact meals. By simply focusing on cultural delicacies, Khor’s antagonistic sidekick and Zimmern erase history that surrounds cultural food production, ignores colonialism, and disregards any oppression producers of the cultural food may have faced. Khor reminds the reader that authenticity is not simply the delicacies of a country, but the intervening years of colonialism, migration, and globalization, too. Both Khor’s antagonistic sidekick and Zimmern fail to acknowledge cultural history and cultural struggles. Instead, the two individuals are simply concerned with boosting their own cultural valor and credibility. In sum, this rampant form of narrow-minded authenticity fails to take into account authentic lives and authentic adversity.

Andrew Zimmern’s show, “Bizarre Foods” perpetuates the very issues Khor deals with on a daily basis. Through broadcasting the show to its target audience - middle class Americans who can afford to travel - the majority of American viewers learn to exotify and appropriate other cultures. Instead of just eating and appreciating, “Bizarre Foods” sets an expectation to assume cultural insight into exotic ways of living through cuisine. Thus, a

new generation is raised expecting gastronomical gold stars. Due to lack of space and time, this paper won't discuss the ways in which "Bizarre Foods" and shows like it perpetuate systems of capitalism through promoting tourist culture in "exotic" places, but does acknowledge this problematic media framework.

Toward the end of the article, Khor suggests a couple of ways in which one can appreciate another culture without appropriating it. "Eat," suggests Khor, "but don't pretend that the food lends you cultural insight into our 'exotic' ways. Eat, but recognize that we've been eating, too, and what is our sustenance isn't your adventure story." In other words, eat, but don't expect anything in return.

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## Lacanian Illuminations

by Brooke E. Minner

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is a novel rich in material concerning Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. In particular, at the end of Chapter Sixteen when Jane learns of Blanche Ingram and her possible engagement to Rochester, Jane's emotional response, neurotic self-talk, and reactionary portrait drawing all reflect Lacan's concepts of the unconscious, the transition into the symbolic, and identity. Moreover, by exploring these parallels within the novel, one can further argue the validity of Lacanian theory.

In a passage from the novel at the end of Chapter Sixteen, Jane finds herself overcome with emotions of embarrassment and shame, and expresses these emotions with a tone of self-unawareness and utter surprise, thus displaying Lacanian concepts of the repression of desires and the unconscious respectively. After learning of Rochester's journey to Millcote to stay with a party of distinguished individuals, one being the "accomplished lady of rank," Blanche Ingram, Jane agonizes over the "probability of a union between Mr. Rochester and the beautiful Blanche" (Brontë 186). Once alone with the idea, Jane describes that she "reviewed the information I had got; looked into my heart, examined its thoughts and feelings, and endeavored to bring back with a strict hand such as had been straying through imagination's boundless and trackless waste, into the safe fold of common sense" (Brontë 186). Jane's description of her imagination's "boundless and trackless waste" is highly relative to Lacan's idea of the "unconscious as a continual movement and activity of signifiers, whose signifieds are often inaccessible to us because they are repressed... a constant fading and evaporation of meaning" (Eagleton 146). Just as the imagination is described as having "boundless and trackless waste," the unconscious is also boundless, in that it's a "continual movement of activity," never ending and always enduring.

Not only does the imagination relate itself to the unconscious in that respect, but also its "trackless waste" can be likened to the unconscious in regards to its "fading and evaporation of meaning," given that anything that evaporates, in this case meaning, leaves no tracks behind. Perhaps the most important similarity between the description of Jane's imagination and Lacan's concept of the unconscious is that they both are a place where desires are found. For example, "the place to which we relegate the desires we are unable to fulfill is known as the unconscious," (Eagleton 132) and although the idea of the imagination implies a conscious state of mind, the diction in this passage, in particular the word "straying," connotes a sense of slippage or escape, as if her feelings entered her imagination from some other place without her conscious knowledge. Furthermore, as Jane describes the emotions she feels, it's as if she is coming to terms with her feelings towards

Mr. Rochester for the first time, reinforcing the idea that beforehand they had only been repressed desires, perhaps residing within her unconscious until this situation beckoned them to the surface. By examining the correspondences between Jane's imagination and the concept of the unconscious, validation of Lacanian theory is further exemplified.

The following paragraphs describe Jane as being arraigned at her own bar, realizing her newfound feelings and then severely punishing herself for allowing herself to have them, underlining still the aforementioned concept of the unconscious while illustrating Jane's failure to fully accept the symbolic order. She describes how:

Arraigned at my own bar, Memory having given her evidence of the hopes, wishes, sentiments I had been cherishing since last night – of the general state of mind in which I had indulged for nearly a fortnight past; Reason having come forward and told, in her own quiet way, a plain, unvarnished tale, showing how I had rejected the real, and rabidly devoured the ideal; - I pronounced judgment to this effect: - that a greater fool than *Jane Eyre* had never breathed the breath of life: that a more fantastic idiot had never surfeited herself on sweet lies, and swallowed poison as if it were nectar.  
(Brontë 186)

The fact that Jane's memory and reason tell her "a plain, unvarnished tale" relates to the fact that her desires emerged from her unconscious, as they are being told to her in a way that is finally "unvarnished," the latter implying that beforehand whatever feelings she had for Mr. Rochester were, so she thought, being shut down perhaps, dismissed or repressed into the unconscious where they belong. That being said, Jane's realization of her inability to subdue her feelings for her master results in severe self-criticism and shaming, calling upon her failure to fully accept what Lacan calls the "symbolic order: the pre-given structure of social and sexual roles and relations which make up the family and society" (Eagleton 145). Following the laws of Lacanian psychoanalysis then, Jane asserts that "it does no woman good to be flattered by her superior, who cannot possibly intend to marry her and it is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it" (Brontë 186). Because the idea of Mr. Rochester intending to marry her completely defies the symbolic order of the period, Jane feels it would be impossible and therefore useless, perhaps even dangerous, to entertain the idea. Jane's assertion also relates to the psychoanalytic idea that although "every human being has to undergo repression... for some of us, the repression may become excessive and make us ill... This form of sickness is known as

neurosis; and... neurosis is involved with what is creative about us as a race, as well as with the causes of our unhappiness” (Eagleton 131-32). The idea that excessive repression leads to neurosis, which is involved with what causes unhappiness, directly correlates with the fact that Jane herself is dealing with the repression of her desires, and dealing with the neurosis as a result. Just as she claims, “it is madness in all women who let a secret love kindle within them,” Jane actually experiences a mild version of madness in the form of neurosis, and not surprisingly her method of coping happens to be a creative outlet, further justifying how Lacanian theory exhibits legitimacy.

In the last few paragraphs of the passage, Jane literally draws a plan to reconcile the desires of her unconscious with the larger symbolic order in which she is apart by drawing portraits of herself and Miss Ingram, thus rediscovering her identity in relation to that of Blanche, which thoroughly illustrates Lacan’s idea of identity and how it’s created. According to Lacanian theory, “identities come about only as a result of difference – that one term or subject is what it is only by excluding another” (Eagleton 143-44). It’s interesting then, that Jane sentences herself to draw a self-portrait only using chalk and without trying to make herself look special in anyway, writing “under it, ‘Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain” and then afterwards, she tells herself, “take a piece of smooth ivory... delineate carefully the loveliest face you can imagine... call it, “Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank” (Brontë 187). Jane places immense importance on the difference between not only the compositions of each portrait, but also on the titles. For instance, the self-portrait only gets writing underneath whereas Blanche gets to be “called” something, not to mention the differences in the descriptions of each portrait. Jane goes on to tell herself, “whenever, in future, you should chance to fancy Mr. Rochester thinks well of you, take out these two pictures and compare them” (Brontë 187). The fact that Jane compares herself to Blanche in order to better remember her own identity and place within the symbolic order is wholeheartedly reflective of the Lacanian notion that identities are a result of difference. In addition, after creating these portraits, Jane describes:

The contrast was as great as self-control could desire. I derived benefit from the task: it had kept my head and hands employed, and had given force and fixedness to the new impressions I wished to stamp indelibly on my heart. Ere long, I had reason to congratulate myself on the course of wholesome discipline to which I had thus focused my feeling to submit: thanks to it, I was able to meet subsequent occurrences with a decent calm; which, had they found me unprepared, I should probably have been unequal to maintain, even externally. (Brontë 187-88)

Finally, Jane is able to reconcile her unconscious desires with her identity within the symbolic order, and subsequently conquer the resulting neurosis

by way of creativity. This reconstruction of identity through contrast goes hand in hand with Lacan's notion of identity and how although "individuals can be studied simply... as a member of a specific social class and so on... we tend to see ourselves rather as free, unified, autonomous, self-generating individuals, and unless we did so we would be incapable of playing our parts in social life" (Eagleton 149). So while Jane is much more than just a member of the governess class, her identification with that class gives her a place within the symbolic order and allows her to play her social role with peace of mind. The therapeutic aspects of Jane's portrait drawing and her regained sense of identity as a result are direct parallels to Lacanian notions of neurosis and identity, demonstrating the soundness of Lacan's psychoanalytic theories.

Conclusively, Jane's struggle to reconcile her desires with the symbolic order illustrates many aspects of Lacanian theory including the unconscious, the symbolic, neurosis, and identity, therefore proving Lacan's notions to be an accurate depiction of psychosexual development.

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## Contributor Bios

Zack Anderson — I've enjoyed writing since I was a kid, and have been writing for fun on and off since middle school. An avid film and television fan, I've tried not only to take inspiration from movies and television programs, but from the experience of the viewer as well. I'm interested in the world we live in, one that's changing and growing in scary and exciting ways. Just as the possibilities for human achievement are limitless, so too are the possibilities for the written word.

Donel Arrington — I am a poet, musician, and writer living in Eureka, California, and going to school at College of the Redwoods with plans of transferring to Humboldt State University when I'm done there.

Anna Badger — I'm a practicing writer from San Diego majoring in Writing Practices at Humboldt State University.

Rebecca Baldwin — I am currently consumed with themes and imagery circling around fabrics, allowing the materials to aid in the discussion of feminine identity and body image, the comfortable wrapping and coddling of insecurities, and of spirituality. I use fabric to set up a domestic environment, serving as a representation for internal structures, and describing duality between the body and the soul. I incorporate a wide variety of mediums such as traditional paints, textiles, and graphic illustration which allow me to pursue different academic environments and explore diverse creative methods in what I believe line with Toyon's philosophy of diversity.

Barbara Becerra — I'm Barbara Becerra, born in Mexico raised in Southern California. Been in Humboldt State since 2011 and this will be my final. Majoring in Studio Art emphasis in graphic design and photography with a minor in marketing. These photographs represent the way that I view human and nature. I see nature and us as one, we both come from the Mother Nature. We are equal.

Kimberly Carlson — I graduated HSU with an MA in English. My novel, *Out of the Shadows* won an IPPY Gold Medal for Best Fiction of the West Pacific. *Queen for a Day* is chapter taken from my memoir. Literature and art and my children nurture my growth as a woman in love with life.

Andrea Curtade – My name is Andrea Curtade a girl from Norwalk, California with roots tracing back to Guatemala. That is the most factual and steady information about myself. I am constantly evolving, changing perception; trying to find my identity through my writing and other's stories. I am the brown girl who wants to learn all she can about her people, the brown girl who wants her voice to be heard; above all, I am the brown girl who wants to be just like every other brown girl – strong.

Haley M. Davis – Born in Maui, Hawaii, I moved to California for school. There are many struggles being far from home, but missing the protests against Monsanto was one that was less expected. When both sides were pushing their weight this print was my protest from a far.

Kristian Gildardo Espinoza – Kristian Espinoza is a Humboldt State University Psychology major, and Ethnic Studies minor. Growing up in a small town in the south eastern region of the California desert, he was exposed to different forms of violence and many forms of racism. His ultimate career goals are to become a Substance Abuse Counselor for the LatinX community by providing cultural celebration and cultivation as a healing method for those who have been subjected to substance abuse disorder. Kristian uses poetry as a way to filter out anger, anxiety, and depression resulting from systematic oppression, and to empower those who don't feel as though they have a voice when it comes to mental health or cultural freedom.

Lorelei O. Farrell – I am finishing my very last semester and aim to resume development for the many creative projects (poetry and fiction) that have been halted; I also hope to especially make headway for one particular project that I hope to one day make into a graphic novel. It is a dystopian and philosophical piece I will call "Shock Therapy". For the most part, I work as an art model, feline admirer, and observer of human weirdness. I hope to travel and find my true passion and creative outlet/resource when I have finished my BA in the English Writing Pathway at Humboldt State.

Kendra Gardner – I'm Kendra Gardner and I'm an English Major at HSU in the Writing Practices discipline. At HSU I hope to develop the skills to use my writing to promote social justice, and hope to teach English in the future. When I am not writing academically or creatively, I prefer to spend my time outdoors. I'm an avid surfer and day-hike enthusiast. I love being a student at HSU because I am immersed in both the academic and the outdoor worlds.

Shiloh C. Green — My name is Shiloh Green, and this December, I will obtain my Bachelors of Arts in Environmental Studies with a concentration in Community Organizing from Humboldt State. I am currently working on graduate school applications in the field of Human Geography. My research interests involve community access to neighborhood amenities in regards to green space and nature. Specifically, if access to green space can be used as a vehicle in fostering a stronger community. In my little free time, I can be found critically analyzing every aspect of society over a steaming honey latte.

Jonathan Greenhouse — A 4-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize, I was the winner of the 2015 Editor's Choice Poetry Award from Kind of a Hurricane Press, the 2nd-prize winner in the 2016 Gemini Magazine Poetry Open, a finalist for this year's Green Mountains Review Book Prize, a finalist for Soundings East's 2016 Claire Keyes Award in Poetry, and a finalist for the 2016 Iowa Review Poetry Award. My poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in Artful Dodge, FOLIO, Miramar, RHINO, and Tule Review, among others.

Elisa N. Griego — I have always held a strong interest in art and biological sciences. Even from a young age, I was quite observant and soft spoken, so as a consequence, I always felt at home drawing and studying the diverse life around me. This intimate, careful observation is just as much an art, a science, and a connection to nature.

Miles R. Hay — Miles Hay was born on a cold November evening, and works tirelessly to save American literature from bondage and sexy vampires.

Ihovanna Huezo — Ihovanna Huezo is a recent graduate of Humboldt State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology.

Sydney Hubbel — I am currently a student at Humboldt State, studying English Writing Practices, History, and German Studies. I work as the Assistant Managing Editor for the Toyon and love the work we do - especially in regard to our multilingual and environmental justice narratives. I am currently a writer for the Odyssey, which is an online platform for millennial writers. I focus my writing on feminist narratives and travel accounts. When I'm not writing, I enjoy reading fantasy stories, listening to alien conspiracy theories, painting, and traveling.

Katia G. Karadjova— I am a library faculty at HSU. I have a few published books and two of them are available in the HSU Authors' collection: a book of poetry and a book of collected and translated Gypsy fairy tales.

Bryan E. Kashon — Born on a mountaintop, (or, as his parents say, the Denver St. Jude's Children Hospital), Bryan Kashon met the world with a non-committal wiggly hand motion. Although the fragile illusion that is his life looks decrepit, Bryan admits that, on occasion, he gives it a good spit-shine to make it look less decrepit. When not hiding under a rock—or capturing heat on one for his reptilian veins—Mr. Kashon is known to act on stage, act up in public, and just generally make a fool of himself everywhere else. If seen call animal control, reassure him gently, and enjoy his stories.

Adyn McCabe —This is my third year at HSU as a Spanish and International Studies double major. Last semester Professor Rosamel Benavides-Garb brought our spanish literary analysis class to the Toyonrelease party. I was inspired by the works in Spanish and for the final class project created nine poems in Spanish and Spanglish to reflect what I had learned and how I felt about the course. The poem included in this issue of Toyon is one of the nine created for that final project.

Jeffrey H. MacLachlan — Jeffrey H. MacLachlan also has recent or forthcoming work in New Ohio Review, Eleven Eleven, The William & Mary Review, among others. He teaches literature at Georgia College & State University. He can be followed on Twitter @jeffmack.

Luke T. McCarthy — I am a new transfer student at Humboldt State University and am majoring in Environmental Studies. I have a background in Forestry/Natural Resources education from Columbia College near Yosemite National Park but have recently found a new interest in environmental justice and public outreach/education. My family has a long history in Tuolumne county, and over half of Yosemite is in that county, so I have a deep connection with the high Sierra Nevada mountains and rivers of my home. This poem is inspired by the tenacious struggle of the American Indians to stop the devastation of this country and the beautiful landscape and precious resources that define it. I am constantly surprised by their continuous fight through hardship, always standing up for their land and people. Their spirit is truly contagious. This work is specifically focused on the Dakota access pipeline issue with the Sioux Indians and many other tribes.

Anthony J. McGough — An aspiring novelist with too many ideas and too much free time. Writing is how I justify my existence. That and snarking. I love snarking. By the time you read this, hopefully, I'll be on my way to an MA at the University of Washington!

Jéssica Melgoza — I am 20 years old and I was born in Santa Ana, Ca. I came to Humboldt State University as a Zoology major but I realized that my true passion was Spanish and French. Since I was young, being Mexican-American was a heavy weight on my shoulders trying to be what both worlds wanted. Unfortunately, transitioning from both worlds was not easy, while I was in the U.S. I was forced to assimilate. While I was in Mexico I was rejected by most people for not being a true "Mexican." I remember being told jokingly, by a family member, "No es ni de aquí ni de allá." This comment tormented for many years to the point where I tried everything to fit in but I always failed.

I'd like to say that I have good grasp on both Spanish and English, perfecting them as I continue my education. Thanks to my mother I was able to properly learn Spanish and feel more comfortable about my identity. Although this comment still torments me at times, I learned that with a proper grasp of a language you are able to communicate and learn about a culture.

Brooke E. Minner — Brooke, a senior at HSU, is majoring in English Literary Studies and minoring in Writing. She enjoys reading and writing poetry, tutoring students through HSU's writing studio, watching movies and writing screenplays of her own. In her free time, she loves staying active and exploring the outdoors, going to concerts, attending and participating in slam poetry events, and cooking eccentric things. After graduation Brooke hopes to become fluent in Spanish and plans on teaching English abroad before moving back to southern California to pursue an education in film and screenwriting.

Ivan de Monbrison — is a french poet from Paris.

Daisy N. Ramirez—Raised in an image based society, I internalized self hate. At a young age, I learned that I was deemed undesirable, by some, because of my weight, class, race, and sexual orientation. What does our culture teach us about desirability, specifically in women?

Barbara Ruth — Barbara Ruth creates at the intersection of Potawatomee and Ashkenazi, disabled and neuroqueer, fat and yogi, not this and not that. Her photography, memoirs, poetry and fiction appear in numerous lesbian, queer, feminist, disability and literary anthologies and journals. She lives with her beloved in San Jose, California, USA.

Cynthia Serrano — Cynthia Serrano is a recent graduate of HSU with a B.A. in English. Her time there was defined by the breath-taking and life-affirming friendships she made while working at HSU's Writing Studio and 4 AM runs to Don's Donuts. She plans on continuing her education in English composition and pedagogy, with a special interest in the application of resistant discourses in academia. Additionally, she aspires to someday follow in the footsteps of Mindy Kaling and create, write, produce, and star in her own tv show, with the intention of diversifying the entertainment industry, while bringing attention to positive representations of women and people of color on screen. Her hobbies include reading, writing, expanding her library, watching unhealthy amounts of television and developing her obsession with K-pop.

Joe Shermis — Joe Shermis has written poetry since he can remember, and has been involved in the poetry world of Humboldt County since submitting poems to the Country Activist in 1989. Since then he has attended hundreds of poetry readings, read at a few open mics, and published a literary magazine, The Steelhead Special. Poetry has been his life, supported by a career in sales and management. Lately he has been the editor of the Ink People's magazine, and has been teaching poetry at juvenile hall.

Erin Urbanus— is a student at Humboldt State University.







